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by Oscar J. Friend

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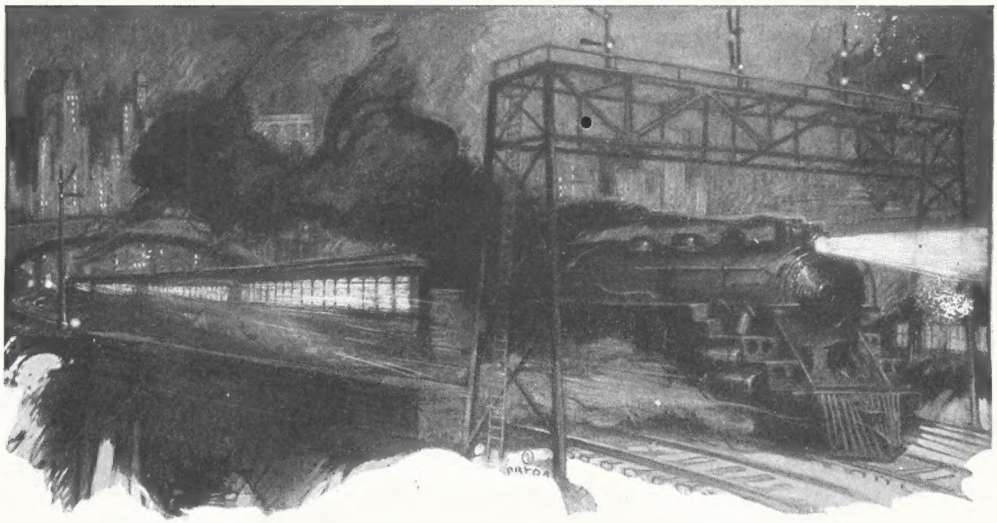

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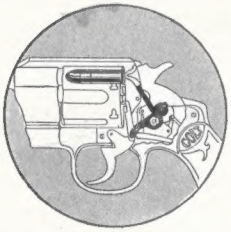

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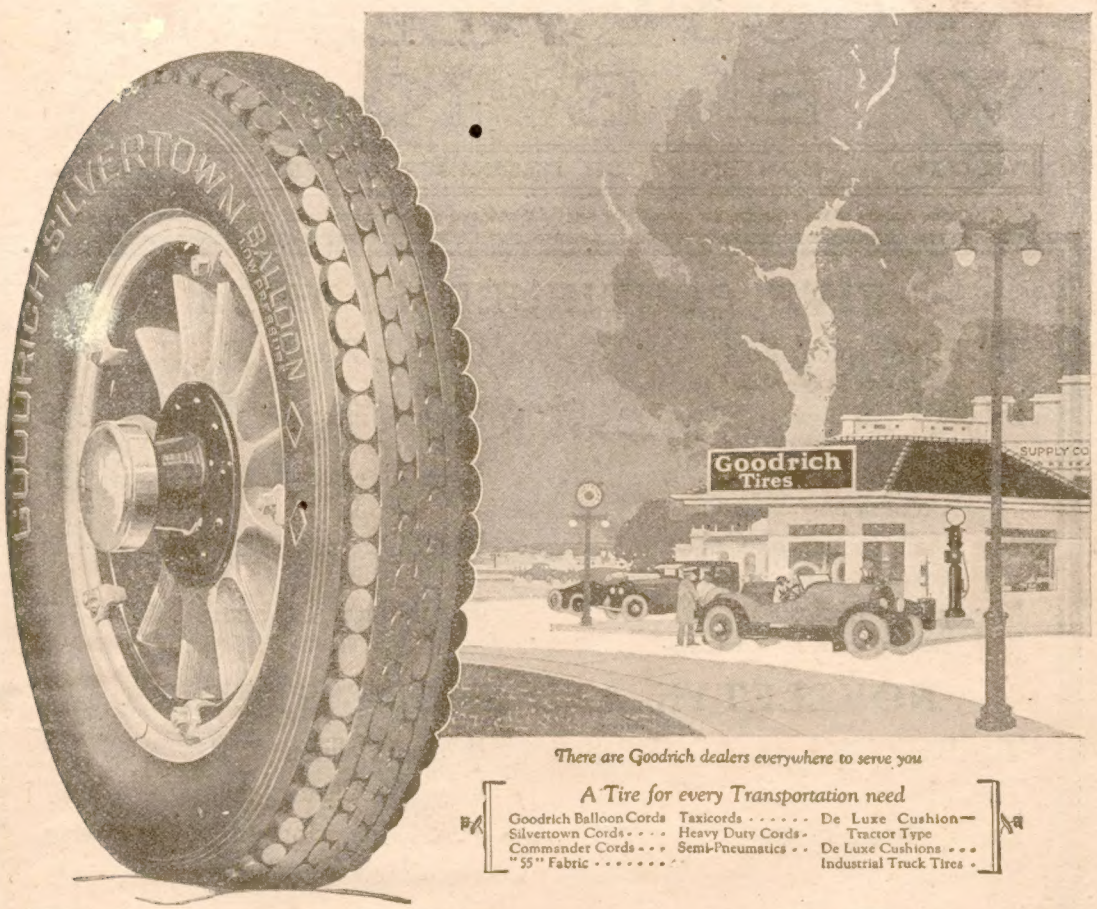

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

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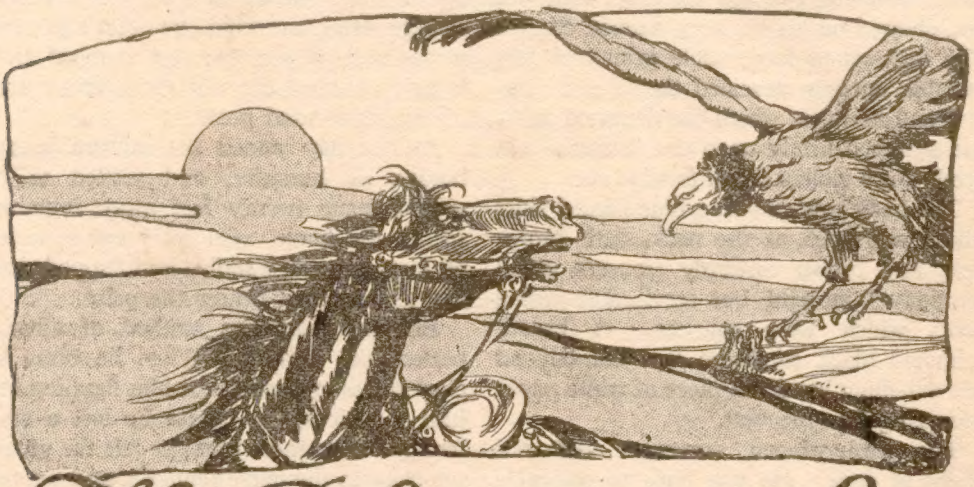

Th' Photographin' Fool*

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

CHAPTER I.

A TRAGEDY OF THE TRAIL.

THE dust lay thick on the trail which wound up along the side and over the top of Eagle Mountain like an unlovely and parched yellow serpent. The sun blazed pitilessly down through a cloudless blue sky, converting every rock into a shimmering heat oven and making a mockery of the scant shade of each blackjack pine and stunted cedar.

A solitary black dot in an otherwise reproachless heaven wheeled in a graceful circle far overhead, slowly and gradually spiraling down to a spot several hundred yards to the right of the trail which led south toward the Red River. The vulture, that repulsive scavenger of the world, had unerringly located a spot where there was work for him to do.

But there was something puzzling about the scene. Of the two objects down there, one moved occasionally and one would

* When this story is issued in book form by McClurg, of Chicago, it will be called "Click of Triangle-T," the new title having been decided upon by the publishers after our cover plates, which carry the author's original title, were made.—THE EDITOR.

never voluntarily move again. The second and more interesting to the evil bird was the body of a man sprawled face up, a gun clutched tightly in hand, staring sightlessly at the blazing disk of the sun.

The dead man had perhaps reached the age of fifty years. A stubble of beard, which revealed the age his black hair did not, showed on his leathery, tanned cheeks. The dust-caked face, while grim and formidable enough, revealed the lines of humor and kindness which the departed spirit had stamped firmly upon the features—too firmly for a violent death to wipe out.

The body was clad in a blue flannel shirt which was open at the neck, dark brown vest, and brown corduroy trousers which terminated in light but serviceable riding boots which were spurless. A broad-brimmed black sombrero lay just beyond one out-flung hand. A piece of white paper was pinned to the vest.

The sable-winged scavenger did not alight at once. He was born to patience, and there was reason here for him to wait.

Above the body of the dead man the first of the two objects stood motionless, a superb specimen of horseflesh even in this country where the automobile had not yet supplanted the equine. This was no common cow pony that stood sentinel above his master. For the reins were not dangling; they were over the saddle horn.

At long intervals the animal would prick up his ears and stare wistfully back toward the trail and then off into the valley below in search of help. Then he would lower his head and sniff gently at the still form under his forefeet and whinny softly.

The rush of powerful wings and the subsequent current of air startled the horse and he threw up his head quiveringly. The cowardly vulture, frightened at this quick movement, veered off and arose in a graceful swerve. He circled high again and then settled.

The horse did not move until the bird was within a few feet of his head and then he reared up and snapped angrily at the flyer. And again the bird veered upward.

All through the long afternoon they played this game—the magnificent horse and the grim glider of the sky. The vulture was puzzled and angered at the stubborn and foolish behavior of this vicious four-footed beast that defended the food he could not or would not eat. Never before had he experienced difficulty in driving animals away from a fallen comrade.

The horse was becoming frantic and savage in his defense against this feathered raider. He knew what the other's presence meant and he squealed and snapped tremblingly, but he did not move away from his self-appointed post.

As the day waned the vulture became bolder, or hungrier, and settled to the ground some twenty feet away from and facing the horse. On solid earth he lost all his grace and waddled and flapped clumsily as he edged nearer the prize.

But this laborious method of advance netted him nothing. When he came too close the angry horse sent him flapping high into the air again. Once he lost a scant handful of feathers when he left the ground too close to the horse's muzzle, and the saddle animal snorted violently at the tainted odor emanating from the bird.

Once a vagrant breeze stirred the square of paper on the dead man's chest and the vulture flapped up in alarm. Was it possible that there still was life? No! Instinct had never misguided him before. This was food; and he couldn't get to it.

Two travel-stained men were riding northward over the mountain trail from the range country of Texas to the range country of Oklahoma. "I wonder" Cal Hargess and "I betcha" Lem Gilmore were on the scout—a sort of rambling tour, which desire to gaze on the other side of the next hill annually seized cowpunchers with itching feet.

"I wonder" Hargess was long and thin. To offset his height he walked with a hump in his shoulders. This made him look, in truth, like a human question-mark.

"I betcha" Gilmore was the direct opposite in build. He was short and fat. He bore more than a passing resemblance to the mythical fat roll of bills he was always so willing to wager.

The tall man drew rein and pointed with his left hand off in the direction he had been squinting for some time.

"I wonder what's wrong 'ith thet fool buzzard over there? He's been circlin' an' settlin' ever since he first come into view an' he ain't stayed down yet."

His companion looked and grunted.

"I been watchin' him fer a half hour. I betcha it's some locoed steer what's strayed up a cañon an' broke a leg."

"It's right over there a coupla hundred yards. Le's go see."

"Naw. We gotta be siftin' if we wanta make Hassan by sundown."

"I'm gonna see what's th' ruckus," declared the first speaker. "If it's a steer we'll shoot it."

"All right," grumbled the other. "Keep a long sufferin' cow hand from puttin' his feet under a restaurant grub table, why doncha? I betcha no other kind-hearted cowboys'd ride outa th' way to shoot a fool cow fer a careless rancher."

To their agreeable surprise they found a faint trail running along the face of the blufflike mountain, forking out from the main trail where it turned southward at the crest of the rise.

"What would a cow be doin' up here?" continued Gilmore as a cedar limb whipped across his face. "Sometimes I git to thinkin' th' sun's done somethin' nasty to parts under yore hat, Cal."

"I dunno what," drawled the other sulkily. "I'm jes' wonderin'. I wonder what yuh're ridin' range fer? Th' Lord only knows—they ain't no real reason. Same kind o' fool question, d'yuh see? They ain't no answer to neither of 'em."

"That ain't no cow, nohow," grunted Gilmore, letting the caustic rejoinder pass for the moment. "Thet's a hoss, an' he's on his feet."

"Shore. But I wonder what's he shakin' his head at thet buzzard fer?"

"Hurry along," urged Gilmore, his anxiety to reach the next town forgotten. "An' quit springin' them cedar boughs back at me."

As they rode forward the vulture, realizing that his long fight was lost after all, took reluctant alarm and arose high on dully flapping wings and sailed slowly westward, a somber shadow against the lowering sun. The two punchers dismounted as the noble horse turned to gaze reproachfully at them for being so late and ran forward to the outstretched human form.

"Godamighty!" ejaculated Gilmore, utterly unaware of his profanity. "It's a man, Cal. He's passed out—deader'n Heck's pup."

"Shore as hell has. Died 'ith his boots on. Thet's better'n a lot o' ways o' takin' off I could think of. I wonder who is it?"

"Looks purty well-to-do. An' ain't thet hoss a beaut? An' standin' guard like a sojer. Didja ever see anythin' to beat thet, Cal?"

"Nope, never did. I've heard tell o' such, but I ain't never witnessed nothin' like it afore today. I wonder how long he's been keepin' thet buzzard off?"

The tall man strove to quiet the trembling horse, while they both stared down with interest upon the story of violence which lay unfolded before them. The scrap of paper attracted their attention at once and together they knelt and deciphered the crude lead pencil scrawl thereon. It was astonishingly colorful to be so brief. This was the laconic phrase:

He warnt fast enuff.

"Don't seem to have been," grunted Hargess sententiously. "Let's see what we can find."

Without removing the weapon, they examined the six-shooter clutched in the right hand.

"Two chambers emptied," announced the long individual. "I wonder if we had oughta scout around fer signs o' th' other feller?"

"Reckon not," opined Gilmore shortly, pointing to a tall gray bowlder about thirty feet distant. "See them two white spots close together where two bullets chipped th' stone? Besides, a bad hurt man wouldn't of stopped to leave such a braggin' message."

"Jes' th' same I'll nose around over there while yuh looks through his clothes fer identification."

Gilmore nodded briefly. Systematically each proceeded with his part of the task. A few minutes later they were ready to compare notes.

Said Hargess, returning to the side of the squatting Gilmore: "Outside o' lizard tracks an' wind mounds I found where a hoss come along this dim trail from th' west an' stopped jes' this side o' thet bowlder. He stomped about sorta restless like while th' rider dismounted an' come over here an' then went back.

"He was a powerful heavy man. Yuh can see his heel marks right there, Lem. He come over to pin on th' unnecessary advertisement, I reckon. Then he forked his bronc an' hit th' trail back th' way he come. This feller made two clean misses. They ain't no sign o' blood. What did yuh find out?"

"They ain't no tag on him," grunted Gilmore. "An' they ain't no brand on th' cayuse. I figger he was shot some time this mornin'. They's three bullet holes in his left side. I reckon he's a rancher, howsomever.

"Ain't it funny, Cal," he went on thoughtfully, "how diff'rent men handles a gun diff'rent? See how this feller's got his front finger an' his middle finger both through th' trigger guard? I betcha he knew how to shoot, though. Look at them lines around his mouth an' eyes. Say, Cal, don't he look sorta familiar to yuh?"

"I was jes' wonderin'," retorted the standing man, frowning. "Didja ever go into a barber shop, Lem, an' have somebody in a chair speak to yuh, an' yuh couldn't rightly tell who it was till th' barber raised him to a sittin' position?"

"Shore. That's 'cause yuh ain't used to seein' 'em layin' down."

"Prop him up an' put his hat on him," commanded Hargess abruptly.

The little puncher attempted to oblige, but the body was in the grip of *rigor mortis*. With the callousness of hard fighting men who are accustomed to violence, a callousness which would have seemed brutal to one who did not know the heart of a cowpuncher, the tall man assisted in placing the body at an angle against a fairly large cedar tree and accomplished the trick by placing one foot on the dead man's stomach, and bearing down with all his weight. The result was satisfactory and Gilmore placed the black sombrero on the dark hair.

The two men looked at each other in quick amazement.

"Lem, do yoh remember 'Two-Shot' Farlane? Th' sheriff o' Haskin County in ninety-five?"

"Do I?" exclaimed Gilmore. "When he was th' man who busted up th' Bellton gang? But what's he doin' 'way up here in Oklahoma fifteen year later?"

"I wonder? I never knowed him personal, but I shore heard heaps about him. They said he was a marvel 'ith a six-gun."

"He was," affirmed Gilmore. "Why, I seen him take two whisky bottles an' set 'em up four feet apart an' then draw an' shoot two shots an' yuh couldn't tell which bottle he hit first. It jes' looked like they both busted at once. I betcha yuh've heard thet story."

"Yep," admitted Hargess, squinting at the two blazes on the face of the bowlder. "But his aim wasn't so good this time."

"Poor ole Farlane!" mourned Gilmore sadly. "He was a good hombre. An' he had to come all th' way up here to get killed."

"Looks thet way. Still, 'tain't so unnatural. I knowed a feller once thet usta be an Injun fighter all his life. He must of killed a coupla hundred Injuns in his time, an' he lived to be sixty-odd. Well, one day he was ridin' peaceable like across a reservation in Utah an' when he didn't show up at home thet night they went after him an' found him out in th' brush 'ith four hundred an' twenty-six bullets in him. He was so heavy they had to bring him in in a wagon."

"Thet's a poor story in connection 'ith th' shot this man was," sniffed Gilmore sourly. "I betcha he didn't miss th' other feller, neither. Th' shots was exchanged at purty close range."

"Anyway, th' other was able to ride off. What we gonna do 'ith him? I wonder did he know anybody 'round here?"

"Must of lived some'eres close. He wasn't packin' a war bag, a rifle, or a coat."

With one accord they turned and gazed off across the level country below. The rolling plains were lush with grass and thick with underbrush. An occasional stand of

sycamore trees glinted, white-limbed, in the afternoon sunlight. There were one or two patches of cultivated land, and a twisting ribbon of willows indicated the presence of a stream of water. Far over toward the left a faint haze suggested the presence of a cattle herd. Somewhere over there would be ranch buildings.

To the right, Eagle trail dipped down the mountain and widened into the semblance of a road as it led away to the northeast and toward the town of Hassan. Faint in the distance could be seen fences and a building or two. And around the entire view, like the circular frame of a picture, lay the blue haze of mountains and hills. Both men knew that beyond the first blue ridge would be another valley, more or less fertile than this, and then another range of hills beyond, until the country flattened out into the sagebrush plains of Kansas and western Oklahoma.

"I reckon it'd be best to tote him on to Hassan 'ith us," vouchsafed Gilmore after a look. An' we better hurry I betcha 'cause night is comin' on apace—as Dude Allison usta say when he was tryin' to write poetry."

"I wonder if this here hoss o' his'n will carry a dead weight?"

"We'll have to see. If he won't I guess we can sling him across one o' these crowbaits o' ourn an' ride double if yuh think we hadn't oughta ride his hoss."

Such a complete adjustment proved unnecessary. The splendid animal snorted and trembled as the two men eased his master across the saddle, but he stood motionless as the body was securely fastened. He was nervous, he was tired, he was thirsty, he was new to such a strange experience.

But there must have been a strong bond between horse and man, for he seemed to realize his master's desperate need of him. He was obedient and stepped daintily along behind the wiry little pony of Hargess.

They had spent more time in investigation and speculation than they had realized and the sun was slipping behind the western range as they rode back into the main trail and proceeded in single file where it dipped over the crest of Eagle Mountain and wound its tortuous way down the mountain side.

Gradually darkness came down and enveloped them. A multitude of stars twinkled into being across the vast bowl of night, shining down like points of mocking laughter at the little procession—at the grotesquely swinging figure across the saddle of the led horse. Another insignificant human life had been snuffed out. Another marker could be driven into the ground at the head of a fresh mound in Boot Hill.

Another duel had been fought with the weapon of the West, the six-shooter. Another old grudge had been settled—almost.

CHAPTER II.

JANE ALSO WIRES.

IN the opening decade of the twentieth century the growing city of Hassan was still essentially a cow town. True, there was a solid business square of various and sundry commercial activities which did not remotely resemble cow traffic. Maple Avenue, avenue by the grace of courtesy, led from the railway station at its western terminus to the city water supply at the top of the hill a scant mile to the east. Situated midway between these two points stood the town square, monument to business and dividing line between the upper and lower townships.

In the section between the square and the city reservoir stood the homes of Hassan's élite. Solid frame houses had virtually replaced all sheds and shacks which had been landmarks of the settlement. Big yards, shady lanes, and a fairly good number of sidewalks attested the modernity of the place and its inhabitants. But the smithing shops, the harness and feed stores, the pens, the corrals, the feed barns and livery stables, the very atmosphere between the square and the station shrieked aloud the fact that, even in this era of progress, Hassan was still a cow town.

In the dark the two Texans knew it before they crossed the railroad tracks. They also knew that in cow towns swift disaster could overtake unknown strangers who carried dead men with them. To provide

against any unnecessary haste on the part of lusty citizens who might act first and inquire afterward, Lem Gilmore halted with their burden in the shelter of a deserted shipping pen while his companion rode leisurely into town to learn if the dead man were known here. In due course he returned.

"This shorely is our Texan, Lem," he remarked as he drew rein at the other's side. "But this has been his range fer about nine-year. I felt out a hoss valet up at th' nearest stable an' he was wearin' his walk-an'-talk britches. He imparted th' news thet Tom Farlane owns an' operates a big ranch called th' Triangle-T outfit, which spreads out to th' west o' th' spot below where we found him. He's thicker'n feathers in a pillow 'ith a certain Judge Terrell who lives on upper Maple Avenue. I wonder had we better amble up thet way an' break things to him?"

"Seein's we're strangers here we can't do him no good ourselves," rejoined Gilmore. "I betcha we're lucky yuh found somebody who knowed him so well. Can yuh find th' place?"

"I got steerin' directions.

"Well, git farther, cowboy. I'm plumb anxious to shift this responsibility onto some feller what needs it."

Through alleys and deserted lanes, by devious and laborious methods they sought and found the home of Judge Wayne Terrell. They halted a brief moment before the white, two-storied house to reconnoiter. Then Hargess leaned over to unlatch the carriage gate.

"Are yuh shore this is th' place?" demanded Gilmore, squinting at the house through the starlight.

"Fits th' description. Le's ride on up to th' shadow o' th' porch an' I'll hold th' broncs while yuh inquire."

"Don't reckon we need do much inquirin'. Look at th' cayuse."

The led animal had pricked his ears and was now nosing eagerly at the cross bars of the gate. He nickered softly as they rode in. To be perfectly sure of their ground they carried out Hargess's plan.

At the little puncher's knock the front door was quickly opened by a woman. While the light behind her revealed fully the stranger's face and dusty attire, to Gilmore the girl was somewhat indistinct save for her outline and the high light on her brown hair.

"I heard Jasper whinny, Uncle—"

She broke off in confusion as she saw it was a stranger she was addressing.

"I—excuse me," she said. "I thought I heard some one's horse."

The man removed his battered hat respectfully and looked frankly into the dark eyes which were nearly on a level with his own eyes which would have reduced him to abject helplessness under other circumstances.

"Does a gent by th' name o' Judge Terrell squat on this here claim, ma'am?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yes," answered she in a clear voice, which held a hint of laughter at his phraseology. "This is Judge Terrell's home. Will you come in?"

"No'm—er—yessum," he corrected himself, deciding to view the judge before inviting him outside. "My name's Lem Gilmore, ma'am."

He followed into the house and down a hall to a room at the rear. The girl opened the door and preceded him into the room. The Texan blinked uncertainly in the light for an instant. Gradually his eyes became accustomed to the glow and he made out that he stood in a sort of study. A big man sat before him at a desk.

"Father," said the young woman, "this is Lem Gilmore. He has asked to see you."

The judge looked up. He was a fairly tall man and he looked bigger in his rumpled linen suit. His black bow tie was slightly awry. His hair was making a despairing last stand at his temples, giving him a faint resemblance to a butler. It reminded the puncher of mesquite growing around the base of a bald mountain.

He appeared awkward; his linens looked as if he slept in them. But it was the awkwardness of power that some men never learn to turn into grace and ease of bearing. The Texan realized that he had found the right man for his confidence.

"Judge Terrell, I'm a cowpuncher from Texas. We ain't never met afore, but I

been referred to yuh as a good friend o' Tom Farlane o' th' Triangle-T. Am I ridin' fence so far?"

"You are," agreed the judge crisply. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd kinda like to speak to yuh in private if th' lady don't mind. It's sorta desperate like."

The judge glanced at his daughter. "If you please, Jane."

She nodded. "I shall be out on the porch when Mr. Gilmore is ready to leave."

"No!" cried the Texan sharply. "Don't go outa th' house!"

"Why not?" she demanded in startled surprise.

"Because—because—er—I got a ornery pardner out there waitin' fer me. An' he's—he's real wild. He might—try to kiss yuh!" stammered Gilmore desperately.

She laughed deliciously and doubled one firm little fist.

"He'd better not," she said. "But I believe you are fibbing. I never saw a cowpuncher who could tell a woman a lie with a truthful air."

"Wait, Jane," commanded the judge who read the earnestness in the Texan's face. "Is this conference something of a personal nature to you, Mr. Gilmore?"

"Not exactly to me. If yuh're a friend o' Farlane's it sorta is to yuh."

"What do you mean?" Terrell demanded quickly, rising to his feet.

Gilmore cast an uncertain glance at the waiting girl.

"Le's yuh an' me go out on th' porch," he suggested uneasily, falling back on his original plan.

A startled expression had come into Jane Terrell's face. Her hands clenched themselves at her sides and she bit her lower lip cruelly.

"Father," she whispered. "I heard Jasper's neigh just before this man knocked. I am going to go with you."

"Was Tom Farlane much to yuh, Miss Terrell?" Gilmore asked of her pityingly.

"Yes, yes," she murmured agitatedly. "Oh, what is it you have to say?"

The puncher looked at the judge who acquiesced with a brief nod. He hitched at his belt uncomfortably. Then:

"Well, me an' Cal Hargess was ridin' this way over Eagle Mountain when we seen a bird actin' curious like offa th' main trail. Only it ain't a eagle; it was a buzzard. So we investigates, thinkin' mebbe they was a steer had oughta be shot. But it wasn't no steer we found. It was a man. He was purty bad hurt. In fact, he was dead. He'd exchanged shots 'ith a man who was a li'l quicker. So we brung him on to town 'ith us. An' Cal's outside waitin' 'ith him now."

Judge Terrell placed a hand on the desk to steady himself. The girl screamed faintly and swayed on her feet. She went blindly to her father's side and he placed an arm about her shoulders.

"You—you have him outside?" asked the judge hoarsely.

Gilmore nodded commiseratingly.

"Will you bring—?"

"In here?"

"Please," the girl murmured faintly, answering for her father.

Father and daughter did not speak while the Texan went out and returned a few moments later with his companion and the still form of the ranchman. After they placed the body gently on a sofa and drew back then, Jane Terrell, still shocked and unable fully to believe the awful news—so quickly can tragedy leap out at one from behind the most unexpected places—dropped on her knees beside the couch and clasped one of the cold, lifeless hands.

"Uncle Tom!" she whispered fiercely. "Oh, Uncle Tom! Speak to me! You're not dead, Uncle Tom. Why, just yesterday we rode up past the reservoir together, you and I. Don't you remember, Uncle Tom?"

"Uncle?" interrogated Gilmore of the bitter-faced judge. "My God! Why didn't you tell me they was a relation?"

"There was no relation," answered Judge Terrell heavily as he lifted the telephone from his desk. "That is, of blood. Regardless; I believe it is best to know the worst at once."

There was a brief silence while he placed the receiver to his ear and called a rural number to the operator. Then, after a pause:

"Hello. Yes, hello. The Triangle-T? Is this you, Barton? What are you doing? Waiting up for the boss? This is Judge Terrell speaking. Barton, your employer has been killed. Can you come to town right away? In an hour? Good."

"I didn't notice any ranch buildin's thet close, did yuh?" Gilmore turned to Hargess.

"Fifteen miles," the judge spoke briefly.

"How's he comin'? In a auteemobile?"

"Horseback."

"Thet's mighty fast ridin'," hazarded the tall puncher. "Hoss killin' I'd call it."

"Barton is the best rider on this range," the judge felt constrained to say. "He'll make it, although he wouldn't push a horse like that all day."

He lifted the receiver again. After two short conversations he put down the telephone and stepped to his daughter's side. Gently stroking her hair he faced the two Texans expectantly. Gilmore nudged his companion and Hargess cleared his throat.

The girl, at touch of her father's hand, dropped her head to the dead man's chest and began to sob unrestainedly. And, accompanied by the soft sound of her weeping and the prosaic ticking of the small clock standing on the judge's desk, Cal Hargess told how they had found the Triangle-T rancher.

Painstakingly accurate as to detail, it was as crisp and terse a recital as Gilmore's had been in breaking the news in the first place. When he had finished, describing the nobleness of Farlane's horse in glowing admiration, Gilmore turned toward the door.

"I'll go an' tend to thet Jasper hoss right now," he declared. "I betcha he's good an' hungry."

"No!" Jane Terrell cried, raising her tear-dimmed eyes and starting to her feet. "I shall care for him with my own hands."

"But, ma'am, he needs rubbin' down an'—"

"Let her go," said Terrell. "It will give her something to occupy her mind."

Jane was still in a sort of coma from the shock, but she led the magnificent dun-colored animal around to the stable and unsaddled and unbridled him with firm hands. While the horse munched on a feeding of oats she rubbed down his glossy body and legs.

All the time her mind continued to revolve about the inexorable fact that Tom Farlane was dead. He'd never ride Jasper again. He'd never talk to her in his kindly vein of philosophy again. She's never even see him again.

No longer would his familiar figure stride into the house and sit down at the table to a hearty meal. Never again would he smoke and play checkers with her father in the study while they talked of the future of the newly constituted state and of politics.

Farlane had come into her life when she was only eleven years old. Side by side with her father he had toiled for the admission of Oklahoma to statehood. Together they had solved many little problems.

And all the time he had grown closer and closer into the heart of the judge's daughter. He had taught her to ride, to shoot with a rifle and a six-shooter. And, as she grew older, he had talked to her, imparting much of his ideas and experience about life in general.

Many a rousing tale had he told her of stirring times along the border when men cursed and gambled and remained true to primitive ideals and died with their boots on. He had not appeared to regret the passing of the old days.

"Yes, girlie," he had said, "the old days are done. Th' pioneer, th' bad Injun, th' tinhorn gambler, an' th' gun-fighter are going the way of th' buffalo. Why, I'm lucky to even hold a ranch, I reckon.

"I can remember th' time when I've seen thousands of steers grazing across Texas an' Oklahoma territory without a fence or a house for miles an' miles. More'n once I've been in a drive from Texas to Montana when we drove slow an' th' steers fattened on the way.

"But th' day of wide rangin' is done in Oklahoma. An' it's best so. Th' pioneer an' plainsman, while a necessary forerunner of civilization, ain't rightly a part of it."

She had protested at this, but Tom Farlane had smiled and patted her head.

"That's progress, my dear. Don't feel so bad, honey. Our herds are safer an' so

are our women. Your old Uncle Tom ain't going to pass on with 'em. He's going to stay right here an' raise cattle an' die in this country."

Such memories were too much for the girl. She flung her arms about Jasper's neck and cried bitterly.

"Oh, Jasper, Jasper," she moaned, "I wish you could talk, boy, and tell me just what happened up there on Eagle Mountain."

And the horse arched his fine neck and nosed gently at her shaking shoulders.

When she returned to the house she was calm—mistress of her emotions. Two men, the sheriff and the coroner, had arrived during her absence. A third man came in directly after her. Neither Sheriff Crouder nor Coroner Lytton were extraordinary in appearance. Crouder was a plain man with a cold blue eye. Lytton was a rotund little individual who smiled constantly, an expression at variance with his office. Jane spoke quietly to the two officials and turned to greet the third man.

Don Barton, foreman of the Triangle-T, dropped his hat to the floor by the door, nodded to the judge and the two officers, gave both Gilmore and Hargess a keen, appraising glance as Judge Terrell introduced them, and stepped forward toward the girl. His face expressing more than a sympathetic warmth, he held out both hands to Jane Terrell, and she gave him both of hers.

"Oh, Don," she said simply. "I'm glad you are here."

He answered nothing, merely holding her hands tight for a long moment. Then he released her and stepped over to the side of the couch. He bit his lower lip as he gazed down at the still form of his employer and his eyes grew moist as his facial muscles hardened.

Crouder nudged the coroner at this formidable expression.

"I'm no coward, but I reckon I'm glad I didn't kill Tom Farlane," he whispered. "I wouldn't want Barton after me."

Mr. Lytton nodded emphatically in agreement.

Don Barton's personality would have been tremendous had he not kept himself firmly suppressed. This really enhanced rather than detracted from his character. He seemed more like a human dynamo. He was just short of six feet in height, well proportioned and muscled like a graceful cat. His features were crisp and alert, his teeth white and strong, his dark hair faintly wavy.

Judge Terrell took charge of the proceedings. Briefly the two Texans repeated their story while Sheriff Crouder took down their statements. They gave their names, ages, address, occupation, and a short explanation of their present rambling expedition. Coroner Lytton made an examinaion of the body. And Don Barton added all that he could to the details. His information was little enough.

"Th' boss left th' ranch house early this morning," he stated in his pleasant voice. "He rode off by himself, saying that he would probably wind up in town. I had most of the outfit at work on the western section and I rode out there with them. I didn't see which direction Mr. Farlane took and when I got back to the ranch he was gone. I have no idea what business he had up on Eagle Mountain, unless he went to meet the person he fought with."

"Was he in the habit of riding up into the hills alone?" asked the judge.

"You know that he rode alone lots, judge," said Barton. "But he generally rode this way."

"Then, such a trip was unusual?"

"For him, yes," admitted Barton. "Occasionally two or three of th' boys would ride up into th' draws an' coulees of Black Butte—to th' west of Eagle—after stray steers."

"Do you know of any trouble he has been having with other cattlemen around here?"

"He had no trouble," responded the foreman decisively. "He was well liked an' respected. You know that."

"Did he anger any puncher lately by discharging him?"

"We have discharged no puncher recently. They all swear by—swore by him. He left all those things to me, anyway. An' if they hadn't been loyal an' willing workers, I'd have fired them."

"Then you can conceive of no plausible reason which took Tom Farlane up on Eagle Mountain this morning?"

"Not unless he went to meet the man who killed him."

"You have mentioned this possibility twice. What reason have you for thinking so?" puzzled the judge.

"None," admitted Barton. "But I can see nothing else to think. It looks like it to me. An' it hurts me to think that he couldn't trust one of his men to do a thing like that for him."

"If it was a ole score chalked against him back in Texas," offered Hargess at this juncture, "I'm wonderin' if anybody would of answered in his stead. 'Two-Shot' Farlane usta be a sheriff down there about fifteen year ago."

Don Barton eyed the speaker quickly. His eyes narrowed speculatively.

"Do you think that is what happened?" he asked.

"'Tain't impossible," remarked Hargess dryly.

Barton's eyes flamed and he clenched his fists.

"If I knew that to be so," he choked, "I'd hound his slayer to th' gates of hell—fair fight or no fair fight."

The judge glanced approvingly upon the foreman and then sighed.

"I guess that will be all for the present. What do you say, sheriff?"

"Well," responded Crouder, gazing down at the scrawled four words pinned to the ranchman's vest, "I'll ride up to th' spot in th' mornin' to verify th' depositions of these two men as a matter of course. Are yuh ready to go, coroner?"

"I reckon," smiled the jovial faced man, "I'll take care of all th' necessary details right away, judge. I 'spose he left a will?"

Terrell nodded slightly as he set his lips. Barton stooped and retrieved his hat and stood for a long space looking down at the face of his employer. Then he straightened his shoulders with a sigh as the two officials left the room.

"I suppose he left everything to Jane," he remarked hesitantly. "I know how fond of her he was. In any case, you'll be wanting me to carry on the ranch work for the present?"

The judge nodded again as he unlocked a steel box he had taken from a drawer of his desk.

"Yes. You go ahead as best you can, Barton. But you are mistaken in your surmise. Mr. Farlane leaves everything to James Farlane, a nephew who lives in Chicago. Jane inherits the ranch only in the event of young Farlane's death."

The foreman's face fell imperceptibly.

"A nephew? Some Eastern dude? I never knew he had any kin."

"I've never seen him," responded Terrell wearily. "I'm wiring him at once. I suppose he'll come down here right away."

As the judge took down the receiver of his telephone Barton frowned thoughtfully and then shrugged. He turned to the white faced girl.

"Jane!" he murmured tenderly. "This—this is terrible. I'm sorry."

Tears once more filled the girl's eyes as she smiled up at him thankfully. He pressed her hands once and then beckoned to the two Texas punchers.

"Come on, boys. I'll find a room to bunk us for th' rest of the night at th' Wilmot Hotel."

Almost with apathy Jane bade them good night and watched them depart. Listlessly she listened to her father calling the Hassan telegraph operator and heard him give the address of one James Farlane at Chicago. Dully she heard the text of the message as his grave voice dictated it over the telephone:

> Your uncle, Tom Farlane, has been killed in a gun fight. You are his sole heir. Wire instructions.
>
> JUDGE WAYNE TERRELL, Executor.

The judge hung up the receiver and turned to his daughter with a wan smile.

"You had better try to get some sleep, little girl," he said tenderly. "I—shall sit up until Lytton comes back."

"Father," she whispered. "This is awful—awful. What do you think of it?"

"What is there to think?" he replied sadly. "The Texas puncher is doubtless right. Tom must have made many enemies

in the old days down in Texas. And one of them rode up on him and shot it out with him. Go to bed now, dear."

She opened her mouth to speak again, but she said nothing. Without another word she left the room after casting one despairing glance toward the couch. In the hall she slipped into a sweater and let herself softly out of the house. She ran all the way down to the telegraph office on the darkened square. And after a brief interval she came away with shining eyes, declining the night operator's offer to accompany her home.

She entered the house as noiselessly as she had left it. She peeped into the study before going upstairs and her heart ached at sight of her father sitting dejectedly, staring blankly into space.

And over the wires to Chicago a second burning message followed the first:

I know that your uncle has been murdered.
JANE TERRELL.

CHAPTER III.

"TWO-SHOT" FARLANE'S HEIR.

IT takes a national disaster to remain a sensation for more than a day. Tom Farlane, owner of the Triangle-T, was buried and his sudden death was no longer the choice subject in bunk houses on the range and street corners in the towns. Already the weather and the fall market had relegated his passing to second place. Life moved heartlessly on while the two Texans loitered in Hassan and Judge Terrell and Jane eagerly awaited word from Chicago.

Regularly for a week Jane drove her father's car down to meet each southbound train. And just as regularly she drove back alone. Regularly every day for a week Gilmore and Hargess marched firmly into Fariday's drug store. And just as regularly they weaved their uncertain way out after an astonishingly short interval.

For Mr. Fariday's concoctions possessed "kick." He supplied a dry country's needs surprisingly well, even for a drug store. Mr. Fariday carried an extensive line of red ink, spirits of niter, tincture of ginger, and the usual cake flavorings for those who were leather and asbestos lined. For the more exacting patrons who refused to drink "Injun pizen" he had tincture of orange peel and high grade toilet water with which to irrigate dusty throats.

For his friends, and it might be mentioned in passing that he had very few enemies, he could produce at will a mixture of alcohol and water which did not know the disfiguring touch of tartar emetic or any other denaturers.

It was after a pleasant hour in Mr. Fariday's establishment on the eighth day that the two Texans reached the mellow conclusion that their funds would give way before Fariday's stock of intoxicants, and they gravely locked arms and made their way down the street, unaware that they were horseless. Some vague idea that they were sailors on the high seas persisted in their thoughts. They followed the line of least resistance which led them down Maple Avenue toward the station because it was downhill travel.

The stranger was kneeling in the dust before the station, intensely interested in a battle between two scorpions, when they saw him. He was medium sized and very trim in build. His blue eyes were popping, his black hair was tousled, and the expression on his face was one of great bewilderment as he studied the miniature combatants before him. He was endeavoring to focus a heavy camera on the death grapple.

His physical appearance would have passed without comment save that he was a well built man. But his clothes arrested —compelled attention. His hat was the color of thick cream and was perched on the back of his head after the manner of a dashing college youth. His suit was a vivid blue, each pocket having a scallop and a heavy pearl button.

His tie was a scarlet Windsor. His low quarter shoes were light tan in color and of an extreme sport type. A large camera case swung from his shoulders. Taken as a complete entity he looked like a futurist's impression of a barber pole. He seemed serenely unaware of his garish appearance.

"I'm wonderin', Lem," said Hargess. "I'm wonderin' if yuh see what I see?"

Gilmore passed a worried hand across his eyes. "I'm gonna swear off," he declared solemnly. "I betcha yuh can't be seein' what I see."

"Is it a circus poster playin' 'ith scorpions?" demanded Hargess anxiously.

The fat little puncher nodded seriously.

"My Gawd!" groaned Hargess. "We got th' deliriums, Lem."

The object under discussion seemed oblivious to the pair. The shutter on his camera clicked and he hastily reversed his plate holder for another exposure. He reached forth a curious finger to stir the two little warriors into renewed activity and one whiplike tail reared warningly.

There was a deafening report and nothing but a cloud of dust remained where the two scorpions had been. The photographer looked up angrily. Gilmore was protesting with his companion.

"But, Cal, th' damn' fool was goin' to touch them repitles," he said as he slipped his gun back into its holster.

"Yuh're makin' a spectacle o' yoreself," rejoined Hargess. "They ain't nothin' there atall. Yuh'll git us locked up fer bein' drunk an' disorderly."

"What are you two loafers doing?" shouted the photographer truculently. "What do you mean by interfering in this photographic work?"

"Yuh see?" said Gilmore triumphantly. "It lives. It talks. It is."

"It ain't," contradicted the tall puncher flatly. "I'm goin' back an' find out what Fariday put in thet last purscription."

"How aggravating!" pursued the photographer in an exasperated voice. "I suppose this is what they call gun-hazing in the Southwest."

"I tell yuh it's alive," insisted Gilmore desperately.

"Yuh're crazy," remarked Mr. Hargess bluntly. "They ain't no such animal as thet outside o' a mail order catalogue."

The photographer had arisen and was dusting his knees as he inspected the two men critically. His gaze became less wild and a hopeful smile crossed his features.

"Hold that pose!" he commanded, swinging up his camera briskly.

The shutter clicked and he proceeded to exchange the exposed plate holder for a fresh one from the case at his side.

"Wonderful!" he murmured happily. "Do you know you are the first real cowboys I have taken since I left Chicago. Everybody I see wears dirty overalls and work shoes. I haven't seen a pair of boots or a pair of leather pants until I saw you. That should make a very good negative. I must develop it at once.

"Are you gentlemen brothers? I ought to be able to sell this picture to the Giant Stature Builder Company. It would make a splendid ad for before and after using their appliance. Hassan isn't much of a town, is it? I was in hopes of getting some real western pictures down here.

"I do portrait work, too. I use my own method for getting highlights and shadows. It is what you would call the double Rembrandt lighting. Can you tell me—"

"Help!" squeaked Gilmore. "Come up fer air!"

"What's wrong?" asked the photographer in surprise.

"We don't rightly know," admitted the lanky puncher seriously. "I'm wonderin' if th' brake ain't busted. Lem, after all thet uncalled-for outburst I'm wonderin'—"

"I betcha," agreed the other promptly, pulling a prescription bottle from his shirt front.

They imbided with all the solemnity the occasion required.

"Now, then," said Hargess, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, "what didja say was th' name o' th' trees yuh growed in?"

"Sir? Oh! I'm from Chicago. My name's James Farlane. All my friends call me Jimmy. What are your names? Do you live around here or do you ride bicycles? Can you direct me to—"

"What's yore name?" demanded Hargess sharply.

"James Farlane. F-a-r-l-a-n-e, Farlane. I'm looking for—"

"Listen to me, yuh imitation comic valentine!" said Hargess unbelievingly. "Do yuh mean to stand there on yore hind legs an' tell us thet yuh're 'Two-Shot' Farlane's nephew? Huh? Do yuh?"

Mr. Farlane nodded calmly. "Tom Farlane was his real name. The owner of a ranch or something like that down here," he corrected.

The two Texans looked aghast at the vividly apparelled stranger. Further comment was prevented by the sudden thunder of galloping hoofs. The alert Mr. Farlane jerked his camera up to his chest and ran to the corner of the station building, arriving there in the middle of the road as a pair of horsemen rode around the edge of the depot. One of them uttered a muffled curse and barely swerved aside in time to miss that lurid figure. The camera shutter clicked quickly and the photographer came trotting back, a pleasant smile on his face.

"That'll make a wonderful picture," he cried. "Just imagine the glorious inspiration of a picture of spirited horsemen swinging along in full gallop, the very personification of the great West. Weren't those riders picturesque? What are their names, do you know? I must let them know I took their pictures and give them each a print."

"Let 'em know yuh took their pitchers!" snorted Gilmore. "Why, yuh jassack, don't yuh know thet sorrel nearly run over yuh?"

"Did he? Surely the rider wouldn't have done anything so brutal."

"He almost couldn't help hisself," grunted Hargess, squinting at the two riders disappearing up Maple Avenue. "Thet was Don Barton, yore uncle's foreman. An' if he wasn't such a good hossman yuh'd of been buzzard meat right now."

"For goodness' sake! Why, I had no idea that— You say he is the ranch foreman? He's one of the men I want to see. Can you direct me to—"

"Yuh won't last long down here," predicted Gilmore, shaking his head dubiously.

There came the sound of distant thunder and a long mournful wail.

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Farlane, his query for other information forgotten for the moment.

"Thet's th' northbound special," informed Hargess. "She don't stop here—unfortunately. Yuh'll have to stay over till mornin'."

"Oh, I'm going to stay," rejoined Mr. Farlane calmly. "Wait a minute until I snap this train. I must have a picture of it as it flashes through here."

His eyes lighted up in excitement as he hastily grabbed another plate holder out of the case and slipped the strap of the latter from over his head, dropping the case at the feet of the punchers. Sprinting wildly down the station platform, he looked for a proper vantage point from which to photograph the speeding train. Fifty yards down the track stood the whitewashed mail rack, gleaming in the sun, arms stiffly extended and holding the mail sack in position for the embrace of the iron arm on the mail car.

This took his eye, and like a runaway rainbow he tore madly down the graveled right-of-way and clambered up onto the stand as the northbound special thundered down upon the station. He calmly leaned against the back brace of the stand and focused his camera.

"Hey! Ye dern fool!" yelled the station agent as he caught sight of that vivid flare of color out there in the sun. "Git offen thet rack! Quick! Ye'll be killed. Jump! Ye jassack, *jump!*"

Whether he heard the agent's cry could only be hazarded because of the terrific noise of the train. Apparently oblivious to his danger he stood there and his camera clicked merrily. And an instant later the iron arm of the mail catcher whipped out and snatched the heavy canvas sack from before his very nose, the rush of air jerking the cream colored felt from his head. There was the screech of tortured brakes as the engineer applied the air. The sound ceased abruptly as he looked back and saw Mr. Farlane still erect upon the rack, and released the wheels with scarcely a check in the speed.

The lower arm of the mail rack dropped against the photographer's shin with a dull clank and he grabbed wildly at the support behind him, almost dropping his camera in the confusion. The jaunty felt hat was whipped under the wheels of the passing coaches by the suction.

The two Texans sat down rather weakly by the camera case. It had been a most unique spectacle.

"He's shore a nut," opined Hargess. "Ain't yuh always noticed thet barbers, pitcher takers, pianny players, an' musicians is kinda off, anyway?"

"Yep," concurred Gilmore. "He's th' genuine article, Cal. He's a photographin' fool."

Farlane came slowly limping up the track, trying to dust off the hat he had retrieved from the cinders. The station agent rushed out to meet him.

"Say! Ye danged fool!" he yelped belligerently. "I'm a good mind to have th' city marshal lock ye up fer obstructin' th' right o' way. D'ye think th' railroad'd pay damages on a stunt like thet? Ye—"

"I'm very sorry, sir," replied the photographer apologetically. "I won't do it again. But I didn't see any better place from which to get a good picture. I think it's going to be a dandy, although the sun wasn't just right. I'll give you several prints as soon as I develop them. My camera catches moving objects just as if they were standing still. It's the lens and the shutter that do the trick. I'll make your picture some time, too. I use an original method to get the double Rembrandt lighting that regular photographers can't beat. I take pictures of almost anything."

The agent snorted and gulped helplessly. He could only stand there, speechless, while the several loiterers laughed uproariously. Mr. Farlane did not see anything out of the way in the matter at all and he limped over toward the two punchers to exchange his plate holder.

"Th' Lord watches over fools an' drunkards," intoned Hargess.

"Thet makes us eligible, too, then," rejoined Gilmore. "C'mon. Le's steer him up to th' judge's domocile."

"Judge?" chirped up Mr. Farlane. "That's what I've been trying to ask you about. I'm expected by Judge Terrell. Do you know where I can find him?"

He wiped the perspiration from his face and neck and grinned happily at his companions.

"But them duds," mourned the tall man. "Them duds," he said reproachfully.

"This th' only riggin' yuh got, Jimmy?" asked Gilmore not unkindly.

"No. I have other clothes in my suit case and trunks. They'll be here to-morrow. But they don't look like these."

"Thank Gawd!" murmured Hargess.

"Where'd yuh git this outfit?" pursued Gilmore. "Shorely not in Chicago?"

"Yes, I did. You see, I thought this was about the right style for this country, and so I put them on to keep from being conspicuous when I got here. I—I didn't want everybody to know me for a tenderfoot. I knew better than to put on those hairy pants and a big hat. Besides, it's against the law to carry a revolver back home."

The pathetic earnestness in his face kept the two men from laughing aloud. They turned their heads to smile.

"Well, c'mon," said Hargess resignedly. "Le's start th' circus parade. Git yore moral courage close about yuh, Lem. This is worse'n th' other job we took on last week."

"I'm sorry," murmured the abject Mr. Farlane. "I didn't mean to insult the intelligence of the people here. I—I didn't know."

"Thet's all right, sonny," encouraged Gilmore. "I reckon we've seen worse fools than yuh."

"Thanks," smiled Mr. Farlane, taking the remark as a compliment. "And, say, I want to see my uncle's foreman, too."

"He'll prob'bly be at Judge Terrell's," announced Hargess. "He's sorta sweet on th' judge's daughter. Shuffle yore feet, mister."

"An' no more pitchers fer th' present," added Gilmore firmly. "This is gonna be a peaceable procession if I has to bust yore machine an' bend my six-gun over th' head o' ev'ry other individual we meets up ith."

Hargess proved to be right in his presumption. Don Barton was at the Terrell home when they arrived, bringing the Triangle-T inheritor. The foreman was just sitting down to dinner with father and daughter as the three came in.

Judge Terrell had grown up with the country. What he lacked in social polish he made up for in brains and friendliness. With the easy familiarity of the range

country he invited them right into the dining room without arising from the table. The three diners blinked wordlessly at the colorful apparition.

"It shorely seems," said Gilmore, hitching at his belt in an embarrassed manner; "I say, it shorely seems thet me an' Cal is fated to bring bad news to yuh folks. This is 'Two-Shot' Farlane's nephew, Jimmy. We brung him up from th' station."

Judge Terrell's jaw dropped in spite of his self-control. Jane could only stare. Barton pushed back his chair and choked. Hurriedly he placed a napkin over his face.

"Things does look kinda bad," consoled Hargess. "We found him takin' pitchers o' ev'rythin' in sight. He purty near got killed twice, not to speak o' nearly gittin' stung by scorpions, but—but it could be worse—mebbe."

"You—you are James Farlane?" The judge finally found his voice.

"Yes, sir," admitted Mr. Farlane, reaching into his pocket and bringing forth a little bundle of papers. "Here's a picture of Uncle Tom and me together, taken about twelve years ago. It's a very fair portrait, although I can make better. Here's your telegram to me, and these are a couple of letters from my uncle to me."

Judge Terrell accepted the items rather helplessly.

"But, why didn't you wire me as I requested?" he demanded. "My daughter has been meeting every train for a week."

"Well," explained Mr. Farlane doubtfully, "I thought of doing that. Then I remembered that there were no instructions I could think of to wire to you, so I just packed up and came in person instead."

"What sort of a joke is this, anyhow?" demanded Don Barton suspiciously. "That is th' dude I nearly ran over coming in a while ago, isn't it?"

"Yes," Mr. Farlane answered for himself, beaming good-naturedly upon his foreman. "I got a beautiful snapshot of you as you went by. As soon as I develop it I'll give you a few prints. You ride pretty well, don't you?"

"Fair," responded Barton briefly, a bit disconcerted at this frank admiration.

"I really believe I should have telegraphed," Farlane continued worriedly. "I'm awfully sorry that I caused you so must trouble, Miss J—er—Terrell."

Jane essayed a weak little smile. She was too dazed, too shocked to do more. This vacuous-faced man in that outrageous garb was Tom Farlane's nephew!

"Oh!" she managed to utter. And then again, "Oh!"

"I don't suppose you've had dinner," said the judge. "Draw up chairs and sit down—you, too, Gilmore and Hargess. This is Don Barton, your foreman. Gilmore and Hargess are the two men who—found the body of your uncle. I must get back to the circuit court at two o'clock. You stay here and I'll go over details with you when I come back."

"Why didn't you tell me that?" said Farlane reproachfully to the two Texans.

"Gosh! How could we?" grunted Hargess, promptly accepting the judge's invitation.

Jane set three extra places and the meal progressed. Very little was said out of the ordinary while they ate. Farlane attempted to chat amiably, but he met with poor response. Barton confined his conversation to brief comments. The two punchers turned assiduously to the dinner. They were there to eat and they proved it. There was an air of constraint which could only have been attributed to the clothes the new Triangle-T owner wore.

Before the meal was over the judge drew from the Texans the story of Farlane's arrival, and at the description of the mail rack incident he shook his head disapprovingly, while Barton eyed his new employer askance.

"I didn't mean to be undignified," defended the photographer uncomfortably. "I hope I haven't disgraced anybody. But I simply had to have that picture."

"Hadn't it struck you as being kinda dangerous?" commented Barton dryly. "Maybe th' judge don't mean th' disgrace."

"Do you think I am in any real danger?" demanded Farlane, wide-eyed. "Will the railroad be angry enough to sue because I took a picture of their train?"

They all looked at him blankly. Judge Terrell was the first to recover. He sighed and arose from the table.

"I told you to come in to-day, Barton," he said. "But that was before I knew Mr. Farlane would arrive. We'll just let our little conference rest for the present. Are you going to town?"

"Yes, sir," responded the foreman. "I'll be riding back to th' ranch. That is, unless Mr. Farlane wants to see me?"

"I'll drive him out in the morning," the judge replied. "Sorry I troubled you."

Barton looked at Jane and smiled.

"Oh, I don't mind in the least," he said.

As the others made toward the front porch he followed the girl into the kitchen for a brief moment. "Jane," he murmured gently. "I'm terribly afraid for th' Triangle-T, but I'll do th' best I can for him."

She flashed him a look of gratitude and gave him her hand which he clasped firmly. She looked after him as he strode lithely out of the room, and then sat down in a chair and stared out of the kitchen window. She almost shuddered as she thought again of the mail-order nightmare which had descended upon them from Chicago.

So this—this—what had Gilmore called him right before his face? This—this photographing fool was a blood nephew to such a man as Tom Farlane. This blundering, picture-taking idiot was the new owner of the Triangle-T. She couldn't help comparing him to his virile foreman.

And this was the man she had sent such a burning, personal message, instead of taking Don Barton into her confidence. This was the man that Tom Farlane had hoped she would like and had hinted at a closer relationship. A wave of revulsion swept over her.

Then she thought again of the kindly, formidable face with the humorous mouth of the man she had learned to call uncle. Tom Farlane had not been in the practice of making such wide errors in judgment. But then, he himself hadn't seen his nephew for years.

"Oh, Uncle Tom, Uncle Tom!" she whispered. "What shall I do? What *can* I do for you? *I* make no difference."

And she dropped her head onto the kitchen table and wept silently.

CHAPTER IV.

JANE EXPLAINS.

JAMES FARLANE detained the two Texas punchers on the front porch for a good half hour after the judge and the Triangle-T foreman left. While not extraordinarily loquacious, they found it astonishingly easy to talk to the new ranch owner. His thoughts seemed to flow in channels parallel to theirs and when they halted or hesitated in their conversation he asked just the right question or uttered just the right words to renew their flow of information.

He was not at all like the chattering parrot they had brought from the station. Instead, this serious-faced young man was like a sponge. Effortlessly he absorbed every word they uttered, and seemed to grasp with ease each half voiced thought.

When at length they departed to hunt for their horses they had the uncomfortable feeling that this blue-eyed man, this young dude from the East, had turned them inside out and examined their works carefully to see what made them go and what purpose or purposes animated them. It was an odd feeling to realize that they, two veterans of the range who had reached the age of discretion a goodly number of years before, had been gabbing like a pair of gossipy old women. They experienced that sensation of self-scorn and exasperation which comes with the realization that one's tongue has wagged too freely.

"I swear, Cal," growled the short Texan, "I feel like a newspaper. They is somethin' sorta compellin' 'bout this here Farlane. I dunno whether we talked ourselves into a job or whether he talked us into one. Anyway, I betcha we don't have to stay if we don't like it. Thet Don Barton is a man worker if I ever saw one. I betcha them Triangle-T punchers don't loaf on th' job none."

"I'm wonderin' if mebbe we ain't gonna want to stay a while. I kinda liked th' look in Farlane's eyes. Mebbe he's cut

man-size after all an' all he needs is fillin' out."

The new owner of the Triangle-T stared speculatively after the two Texans as they ambled down the street in the true cowpuncher's awkward looking gait. He saw nothing incongruous in their vividly contrasting appearance. He was thinking of the characters behind those odd exteriors. He was considering the possibilities of friendship, of trusted men at his back if he should need them. Then he walked around the house and sought the stable-yard to view the horse Jasper.

Jane, in carrying on her housework a short while after, went out to throw the scraps to the chickens and found him there —for men may die and women may weep, but work must go on. There they stood together in the barnyard, the horse and the man. How Farlane had succeeded in reconciling Jasper to his vivid clothes was a puzzle, but that they had made friends was an incontestable fact.

The man was stroking the glossy neck and gently scratching the satiny ears of the animal. His back was toward the girl, but she could see his shoulders jerking convulsively. And Jasper was nuzzling at him affectionately.

This sight gave her a queer thrill. Just so had she sobbed out her grief at the neck of the splendid horse. She withdrew without approaching nearer and returned quietly to the house, her heart a tumult of indescribable feelings. That this simple minded egoist could weep did not render him more scornful in her estimation. Instead, in a way, it relieved her; it made him more human.

She was making preparations to scald the dinner dishes when he came back into the house. She heard him pass along the hall between the kitchen and the judge's study on his way to the front room. Involuntarily she paused to listen. This man was beginning to interest her.

She was pouring the boiling water from the teakettle over the prim pyramid of china stacked in the rinsing pan, when she heard him approaching through the dining room. She replaced the kettle on the stove and looked up inquiringly.

Farlane had removed his coat and tie and rolled up his sleeves. His soft, white shirt was unbuttoned at the collar and turned back, revealing a firm pillar of a neck lifting out of a fine plateau of well-developed shoulders and chest which tapered away to a slim waist. His black hair was brushed straight back from an intelligent-shaped forehead. She noticed that his arms, while very white under their covering of fine, black hair, were corded and muscled. She forgot those hideous peg-top trousers and ugly shoes in the contemplation of his face.

A mentally alert stranger was gazing out at her through dark blue eyes whose lids were a trifle reddened. The very contour of his features seemed different from those of the man the two Texans had brought into the dining room. He looked astonishingly like Tom Farlane, except for the difference in age.

"Let me help you," he said quietly, taking the dish cloth from the table.

She looked at him, startled. Again she was at a loss for words to say to this man. Apparently unaware of her mental confusion Farlane began drying the steaming dishes, handling them with a deftness at which she wondered. It was an old sensation, too, this. Of all the men she knew, Jane could not think of a one who could have accomplished this task—who would have even offered.

"You work like a practiced hand in the kitchen," she managed to smile as she found another cloth.

"I have washed dishes for my next meal."

"You—you were penniless, and had to work for food?" She was amazed.

"I've been somewhat like Uncle Tom," he replied. "I've roved about a bit. And when a person does that they have to learn to do many things. Of course, one does best what one likes best."

"I suppose you are best at taking pictures," she could not refrain from saying.

"Not at all," he said, smiling frankly into her eyes. "I'm best at admiring plucky women—and faithful horses."

"Oh!" she gasped, and thought again of that scene she had come upon in the stable-

yard. She colored faintly and felt guilty and confused, but she did not feel any resentment at this plain compliment.

He did not force the subject, but fell back on commonplaces until the last dish had been dried and put away. After she hung up the towels behind the stove, wondering what would come next, he reached into his breast pocket and drew forth a folded yellow sheet of coarse paper. This he offered to her and she accepted it with trembling fingers, which could hardly open it, although she knew beforehand what it was.

"Now," he said quietly. "Jane Terrell, why did you send me that message?"

She read the purple-typed words before answering. The phrasing, the very text seemed almost strange to her as she viewed it in typed letters, but every word was her own. She was irrevocably committed. She wondered how this man was going to take what she had to tell him. Well, she'd find out.

"Because it is true," she burst out passionately. "That was why I wired to you. Everybody else took it to be an unfortunate shooting affair. Nobody dreamed of anything else, not even my father. But I know that Uncle Tom was murdered, foully murdered—and I couldn't prove it."

"You called him uncle?" he asked gently, a queer note in his voice.

She nodded, eyes brimming.

He placed soothing fingers upon her shoulders and looked deeply into her eyes. He did not question her startling assertion in the least. Neither did he wave it aside as being ridiculous. He did not ask, "What makes you think so?" Instead he said:

"Tell me how you know, Jane."

In one way her information was quite disappointing; it was so pitifully meager. In another light it was a startling revelation.

"Uncle Tom and father have been the closest of friends for more than eight years," she began diffidently. "You must understand this, Mr. Farlane, because that is how he came to mean so—so much to me. He taught me how to ride, to rope calves, and how a ranch is run. Father and I have spent many pleasant weeks out on the Triangle-T.

"And when we were alone together Uncle Tom taught me how to shoot a gun and a rifle. I—I'll never forget how he always used to smile at me and—and say," —sorrow almost overpowered her, making her speech indistinct—"that the days were gone when—when it was a necessity for women to learn to shoot, but that it was a useful accomplishment.

"And when those two Texans described the—the exact manner in which they found him I knew instantly that he had been murdered. You see, I knew just how he handled a gun. And, Mr. Farlane, your uncle never shot a gun with two fingers on the trigger. *That gun was fired and placed in his hand after he was dead.*"

"Go on," urged Farlane in a level tone as she stopped, a cold flame growing in his eyes. "I am listening."

"That's all," she murmured. "That is why I sent you that telegram. Nobody knows who killed him; nobody knows why. And I only know that it was a foul murder disguised as a gun duel. And so I wired you what I knew to be the truth. And you—and you—came"—she was on the verge of tears again—"looking and—and —acting so—so disappointing, after I'd looked and looked for you all week—And then to see you so—so—"

"Like a fool," he finished for her. "I am truly very, very sorry. Can you believe me, Jane? I really am not quite as big a fool as I seem, although I'm bad enough at that."

"But why? But—but why?" she asked helplessly.

"Haven't you stopped to think that your peculiar message might have had something to do with it?"

"I—I don't understand."

"I got your father's telegram; then I got yours. They didn't fit together exactly. I could tell there was something queer. As I've been doing some special photographic work the last few months for the Realistic Film Company of Chicago, and as I had quite a collection of photographic supplies and equipment, I found it easy for me to come as I have."

"Still—"

"I really am a tenderfoot here. I don't

know a thing about cattle except that they give beef and milk. I don't know the country and I don't know the people. If I expected to be able to do anything toward clearing up this mystery I had to have something like an even break with the rest. There is no better advantage than in being underestimated. That there was a mystery I knew from a comparison of those two wires. Can you forgive me?"

"Why—why, of course," she stammered uncertainly, all of her previous conceptions of this man swept away. She was bewildered, staggered by this striking metamorphosis. She was astounded at the depths, yet flattered by the earnestness of the support he had given her, all on the strength of a lone telegram. She knew that it took a strong-minded man deliberately to seek contemptuous ridicule no matter the cause. For ridicule is a stinging rapier.

"You—you certainly made a terrific first impression, I'm sure," she smiled tremulously. "I can hardly reconcile you with the—the jumping jack who risked his life twice this morning to take pictures."

"Oh, that," he depreciated. "Barton's horse would never have run me down. My sudden appearance in this color blind suit would have swerved aside the bravest horse that ever stepped. As for the mail rack incident, I did that for the purpose of being taken as thoughtless. And I don't believe I was ever so scared before in my life. My clothes are still clammy with perspiration. I haven't much nerve."

"But—but the scorpions?" she questioned.

"I wouldn't have touched them for a hundred dollars. I saw the two punchers out of the corner of my eye. Of course, I had no idea who they were, or that they'd shoot the insects right out from under my hand. But, about this gun business, now. That was rather crude, don't you think? To take such a risk by putting two of his fingers through the trigger guard?"

"I imagine they did it to fix the gun firmly in his hand. And then, it wasn't such a risk because nobody knew just how Uncle Tom held a gun. It was just by chance that I knew it."

Farlane took from his trouser pocket a curved briar pipe and filled and lighted it. It was a graceful looking thing, and somehow gave him a crisp appearance of masculine efficiency. Jane admired the picture he made as the smoke curled about his head and drifted toward the ceiling. After a moment of thoughtful silence he spoke.

"As soon as I talk things over with the judge we must get down to cases. We haven't very much to start on, it's true."

"I hear him coming in now," said Jane, rising to her feet. "Oh, how I hope—"

"I take it you haven't said anything to him as yet," said Farlane quickly.

"I—I hadn't until yesterday," she responded. "I—felt as if I was committed to that telegram, but when you failed to come and we failed to hear from you, I thought I had better tell father what I was sure about, even though he laughed at me."

"Did he?"

"No. He merely looked at me strangely and said he wished I had told him about it before. I told him that I had wired you, and he looked as though he thought I had made a mistake."

"And when you saw me, I guess that was about the last straw, wasn't it? Come on, we're going to interview the judge."

They followed the judge into his study and seated themselves.

"I have asked your daughter to be present," Farlane explained in answer to the judge's look of inquiry. "She has told me all about the matter."

The judge was not given to asking many questions. He merely glanced at the girl and nodded briefly and then studied the young man with keen eyes. What alterations he found it necessary to make in his estimate of the new Triangle-T owner, he did not allow to show on the surface. He plunged at once into a concise discussion of Tom Farlane's affairs.

Farlane listened with alert interest. When the judge concluded his talk and asked if there were any questions the new owner of the ranch said immediately:

"Why did you wish Jane had told you of her discovery before?" With one little question he had cast aside all the details of his inheritance and had jumped back to the matter of his uncle's death.

"Before I feel that I should answer that I must ask you to tell me frankly and unreservedly why you came to Hassan like a simpleton."

The young man complied in crisp, terse sentences. Judge Terrell became lost in a brown study as the other finished. That he did not approve of this rather melodramatic action was obvious, but there was a light of interest in his face and the faint twinkle of friendliness in his kindly eyes.

"I think you have made a mistake," he said. "If there is a mystery here, you have to slip but once, and you are done for. On the other hand, if you succeed in carrying on this mask you are liable to be killed by some crude soul to whom your portrayal is obnoxious. Some ruffian is likely to force a fight on you and shoot you out of sheer wantonness."

"But I won't fight," protested Farlane.

"Whether you will or will not will make little difference in the ultimate result. They'll make it seem as though you had. There are still men in this country who are rough and brutal, who are wholly without imagination. To men such as this human life has no value, no meaning. There are others who are soulless.

"I know it seems impossible for such characters to still exist in a civilized country. Nevertheless, they do, my boy, they do. Honor and conscience are unknown words to them. There are still sections of this country which entirely lack law and order. I know, and your uncle knew."

This was food for earnest consideration. Farlane blinked and digested it thoroughly. It gave him a faint feeling in the region of his stomach. There were many things more appealing than a sordid death at the hands of a drunken cowboy or lawless criminal.

Being the owner of a wealthy ranch meant nothing if one could not enjoy it. Why not forget the whole matter and shut his eyes to the fact that his uncle had been murdered. Why not leave the ranch in the capable hands of Judge Terrell and Don Barton and take the fastest train back to the East where he belonged?

He suddenly felt homesick for the roar of the big city, for the traffic on Michigan Boulevard, for the gusts of wind from Lake Michigan. There at least was law and order; here was—what?

He looked up to find Jane Terrell's eyes fixed upon him. She was watching him with fathomless, starry eyes. If a girl like her could live in such a country, he could at least try to do so. After all, there probably was little to fear. Doubtless the man who had killed Tom Farlane was living in trembling fear of apprehension from hour to hour. He faced the judge and his lips tightened.

"I'm sorry, Judge Terrell. I'm here, and I'm going to stick it out if I get killed for it. At least I have a chance. Any other way I'd have none. Besides, it's too late to act differently now. It would look suspicious. If anything does happen to me I want Uncle Tom's will to stand just as it is. I hereby endorse Jane Terrell as my lawful heir."

"I do not feel that I can agree to this," frowned the judge.

"You have no recourse, sir. It is my right, and it is my business. I do not mean to be insulting, sir."

The judge waved one hand, casting such a thought aside.

"You will at least remain quietly on the ranch while we attempt to unravel this mystery?"

"I shall do my best to track down the assassin of my uncle."

"But, my dear boy," the judge was exasperated. "What attributes, what qualities, do you bring for such an undertaking? Can you ride?"

"I can sit a horse, but of course, I'm not a bronco buster."

"Can you shoot?"

"I hold a couple of medals for marksmanship with the rifle and the duelling pistol. It's true that I'm not what you could call a gun fighter."

"Uumm. Fair, fair. But, can you rope, brand, fight, trail a man in the hills? Can you even manage your ranch?"

"Well, I hold several athletic records, if that tells you anything. And I can learn to do all that."

"That's fine," endorsed Terrell. "But it is hardly enough for me altogether to lend my sanction."

"Very well, sir. I shall go it alone," stated Farlane grimly. "At least, I depend upon your honor and discretion to consider all of this confidential and to keep silent regarding Jane's discovery so that I may work unsuspected."

"What's that?" exclaimed Terrell sharply.

The other repeated his statement.

"No, sir," shot out the judge. "By gad, sir, no. I cannot agree to such a silence when I have a clew to—"

"You have what?"

The judge compressed his lips savagely. But it was too late. The damage had been done. With a very bad grace which gradually disappeared he made the best of it and explained himself.

"Before the coroner came back for your uncle's body," he said, "I looked again at the brief and boastful message pinned to his vest. I happened to turn it over, and I saw something we had all missed before. No one had thought to turn the paper over. But what I found did not point at a murder and I put the paper away and said nothing until Jane came to me yesterday with her story. Then I knew I had a clew, whether valuable or not, I could not tell.

"I telephoned at once for Don Barton to come in to see me this morning. That was why he was in town to-day. I intended consulting him about the matter when you arrived. Naturally, in view of Jane's telegram to you, I hesitated about it until I had decided what to do with you. Now, I think it is best to proceed with my original idea. If there is anything to this matter Don Barton is preëminently the man to find it out. God knows I hope we are not too late."

"But the clew—the back of that message!" exclaimed Farlane impatiently. "What was it, and what of it?"

"I'll show you."

Judge Terrell unlocked his strongbox and took out a square of paper. It had one ragged edge and two pin holes. Eagerly Farlane accepted it and spread it out on the desk between him and Jane. Their heads touched as they bent over it. On one side four words sneered up at them in a crude scrawl: "He warnt fast enuff."

The other side was the upper half of a used letterhead.

ROCKMAN & STRAND
Consulting Geologists
404-408 Tolsten Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio

June 3, 1910.

KING HAINES, Esq.,
Care Break-o'-Dawn, Craggs, Oklahoma

Dear Sir—In response to your letter of May 26 asking for the presence of a field man, allow us to point out the fact that you have given us no references of any sort. Before either of us go to such an expense as this, if you are so positive of your find, suppose you ship us several samples of rock and sand from the exac . . . spot for analysis. Immediately upon any . . . tions of . . .

This was all. The lower half of the letter was torn away.

"Uumm-hummm," commented Farlane thoughtfully. "Letter is only two weeks old. This fellow seems to think he has located a mine or something. Who is he, do you know? And where is Craggs?"

"This is something you didn't tell me," murmured Jane reproachfully to her father. "What a romantic name—Break-o'-Dawn. I wonder what it means?"

"Did you write to this Rockman and Strand firm?" inquired Farlane. "If so, have you had a reply?"

"Not so fast, not so fast," protested the judge. "I have done nothing but investigate this man Haines on the quiet. I didn't suspect murder until yesterday. Haines is the owner or lessee of a piece of land between the Triangle-T and this settlement of Craggs. He has a very small outfit, the Bar-Circle, and works only two or three punchers. He has been there something like a year and is not a troublesome man.

"Craggs is a wide place in the road twenty-five or thirty miles west of here. As I understand it, this Break-o'-Dawn is a sort of hotel and general eating house there. I've never been there because it's back in the hills somewhat.

"It is by no means certain that this man, Haines, is implicated in this matter. Barton said that Tom had no trouble with any of his neighbors, for one thing. In the second place, I understand that Haines is not an illiterate man, and that is most assuredly an illiterate scrawl."

"Have you notified the sheriff, the marshal, or whatever officials are generally told of this?" demanded Farlane.

"Not yet. You see, we've tumbled on to this thing by accident. The scoundrel, or scoundrels, will not know that we suspect anything. Now, it is my idea to quietly put Don Barton on the trail and let him ferret out matters. You can easily see—"

"How long has Barton known my uncle?" cut in Farlane.

"Why—er—I can't say. He came to this part of the country about three years ago. He has been the Triangle-T foreman for nearly that long."

"Offhand, then, you would say that he knew Uncle Tom for three years?"

"Why, I guess so," nodded the puzzled judge. "What are you getting at?"

"Just this," rejoined the younger man crisply. "Your idea is exactly the same as mine—except that you have failed to guess who is going to play detective. I need Don Barton to run that ranch—something I can't do. On the other hand, I have the sneaking idea I can smell around as well or better than any one else in the guise of a picture-taking fiend. Besides all that, I've known Tom Farlane for more than twenty years and I am his nephew. I'll do the ferreting."

"But—but—" stammered the judge.

"That is what I am here for, Judge Terrell," said the other finally. "I am determined."

"What would be your first move?" asked the judge curiously.

"It is already made," Farlane rejoined quietly. "You are not to take me out to the ranch to-morrow. I shall ride out on Jasper, in company with Hargess and Gilmore whom I have hired to work on the Triangle-T. I think I have made friends with all three."

"Well, you are a fast worker," capitulated Terrell admiringly. "I'll agree, on the condition that you deal me a hand in the game, and with the understanding that I shall at once act on my own initiative should the slightest mishap befall you."

"That's fair," conceded Farlane, and held out his hand frankly.

They gripped hands firmly.

"Now, then, your first task is to write to this Cleveland firm and learn what you can about this Haines in professional confidence," stated Farlane. "Next, as soon as my stuff comes in, call me up at once so I can send a wagon in for it. There's several hundred dollars' worth of photographic equipment in it. As soon as I spend the necessary number of days establishing myself and my picture craze thereabouts I shall turn my attention to Mr. Haines. Whenever I learn anything I'll come in and discuss it with you."

He turned to the waiting girl. He suddenly remembered that they had been over that torn letterhead together. He fancied that he could still feel a tendril of her fragrant brown hair tickling his cheek. He rather enjoyed this lingering suggestion of intimacy. He held out his hand decisively.

"As for you, you're a brick, Jane," said he. "And I've met lots of girls. You're in on this proposition, too. Just the three of us. Is it a bargain?"

"It is," she said firmly.

"Are you going to be able to muster up a little genuine pity for the harmless nut who now owns the Triangle-T?"

"I'll try," she promised.

"Shake!" he cried. "I'll like that—in spite of the existence of my foreman!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

A WISH

FRIENDS are unfaithful, love is untrue,
Life a disappointment, joys are few.
Take everything from me except my ideal—
Leave me my illusions, they only are real.

Dorothy Harriet Fitch.

The Black Wolf

By WILSON COLLISON

Author of "The Return of Bill Buddie," "The Third Bottle," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

I MET Monsieur Paul Celestin one night in a quaint little café in Montmartre. I had been in Paris only a few weeks, and during my spare time I made it my business to go into strange places, to seek bizarre sights, to come into contact with unusual people. I am forever seeking oddities of crime and those who do clever things in clever ways.

Monsieur Paul was sitting at a little table in a dimly lighted corner of the room dining with an exquisitely beautiful woman who was literally covered with rare and costly jewels. I think that it was the gleaming splendor of those jewels which first attracted my attention.

I was alone in a cozy little booth not far from where Monsieur Paul and his vivacious companion were sitting. I studied them covertly. They were decidedly a distinctive pair, arresting personalities in this gay night-life resort with its laughter and clink of wine glasses.

Monsieur Paul was perfectly tailored in evening clothes and his companion wore a daringly cut gown of black. The man had sleek, dark hair and keen, sharp eyes. Those dark eyes, though they might awaken to sudden fits of passion or rage, seemed to look out coolly upon a world which I fancied he knew too well. The fact that the law had not wound its tentacles about Monsieur Paul was due to his extreme cunning, his magnificent poise, his strange sense of humor—but principally it was his fearlessness which kept him from being pounced upon.

Garçon, a famous newspaperman about Paris, joined me fifteen minutes later at my table and after exchanging a bit of bandinage, I called his attention to Monsieur

Paul and his charming companion. Garçon, who is noted for his wit and rare good taste in discussing the unspeakable, glanced shortly at Monsieur Paul and turned back to me with a slight shrug of his expressive French shoulders.

"*Monsieur,*" he said with a little smile, "is it that you call my attention to one of the greatest geniuses in all France?"

"A genius?" I repeated with considerable interest. "Just what is his line—in other words, what form of art does he pursue in such a magnificent manner?"

Garçon shrugged again and lighted a cigarette. He ordered more wine and leaned across the table, pointing his finger at me. His eyes twinkled; I fancied that I read deep amusement in them. "As the agent of a great American jewel concern, *monsieur,*" he said naïvely, "you should know Monsieur Paul Celestin. I have not the shadow of a doubt but that some time, somewhere in the world, you will meet him—and when you do, *monsieur,* you will doubly realize and laud his genius."

That was all Garçon would say. I tried vainly to secure more lucid information from him, for I was enormously interested in the personality of the handsome young man, Monsieur Paul Celestin.

In New York, I operate a private detective bureau with my friend and counselor, Bill Buddie, who has gained considerable fame as a ferreter out of crime. The commission to go to Paris for the jewel insurance company came at a time when I was exceedingly tired of my business and fed up with hard and uninspiring work. Bill Buddie had practically ceased to function as a gentleman of consistent labor and had refused absolutely to touch more jobs until I had provided him with a prolonged vacation. Bill, I think, had expanded with his success and his income had reached such pleasant proportions that he no longer felt it necessary to exert himself nor to consider my interests.

The World Insurance Company requested me to go to Paris to investigate the repeated thefts of valuable jewels taken from the hotel rooms and apartments of wealthy Americans. When the commission was tendered me, I had no reason to believe that I should accept it—but the next morning when Bill Buddie strolled in after a week's disappearance, the whole matter assumed a new and more interesting light—at least for Bill.

He went into ecstasies when I mentioned the case to him. He remarked loudly that he loved Paris because he had never been there, and told me that if I'd arrange to sail immediately, he'd reform and go with me.

That gave me the needed impetus and the desire to accept the commission. Without Bill I am lost. When I am working with him I am impatient and puzzled by his eccentric moods. When I am forced to handle a case alone I am hopeless. The enormous growth of my private investigation bureau has been due solely to the undeniable genius of Bill Buddie, the most recondite personality in the world.

On this particular evening, the first time I had ever laid eyes upon Monsieur Paul Celestin, Bill was not with me. I had left him in the hotel reading a humorous volume by an American humorist called "Fish I Have Caught Without Hooks." Ever since our recent fishing trip in the Adirondacks, Bill has been studying fish and giving me deep-water advice. Because he knows I lack a sense of humor and care less about fishing.

At this precise moment I was wondering vaguely what Bill would say if he could see Monsieur Paul. Bill is a keen student of human nature and his first summing of a man is usually his final and correct one. The sleek Frenchman gave me cause for serious thought. I cannot tell why exactly, as I am one of those persons who never seem to have a real reason for any of their impressions.

After watching Garçon for a little while I averted my head slightly and gazed critically at Monsieur Paul again. Assuredly, he was a finished product. He had all the finesse of a perfect gentleman, the ease and grace of the *boulevardier,* the charm of the Old World.

A moment later, Monsieur Paul lifted his eyes from his wine glass which he had been contemplating for some time in silence, and looked directly at me. I was startled by his

calm, measured glance. It seemed to me that his eyes were set glass balls, so unwavering were they. And a second later I was doubly amazed to note that he had bowed slightly; his beautiful companion glanced at me swiftly and as swiftly dropped her eyes.

"Ah," murmured Garçon, with an amused smile, "I see that Monsieur Paul knows you."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed in a low tone, a trifle flustered. "I have never before seen the man." A silence followed then during which I toyed a bit nervously with my wine glass, trying to connect the man's evident recognition of me with my knowledge which he might possess of my alliance with the World Insurance Company. Still, what possible motive—

I shrugged and began to talk idly of the change which the war had wrought in Paris. I wanted to get Monsieur Paul out of my mind for a while. He was wielding an uncanny interest for me. I disliked it. I would have given a great deal to talk to Bill Buddie concerning that indefinable personality.

Garçon opened up then and talked volubly. I listened in respectful silence. A short time later, as I was preparing to leave, I was startled to hear the head waiter speaking in an excited tone and I quickly turned my head to see the cause of the disturbance. Garçon had swung round, too, as had nearly every one in the café.

I emitted a gasp of amazement. Coming straight toward me, weaving in and out among the tables, was Bill Buddie. He was clutching the head waiter by the arm and was fairly dragging him along.

He had almost reached our little booth before he saw me. He let go of the waiter and waved his hand at me, shouting out something I couldn't understand. The head waiter began to gesticulate and argue heatedly. Bill turned to him and tapped him with considerable force upon the breast.

"Listen, kid," I distinctly heard Bill say, "I told you that bird was in this potato plant. See him—right there." And to my horror Bill pointed me out and roared with laughter. "You guys don't understand Chinese yapoon the way I issue it. Savvy? The next time I want a number sung in this joint I'll make a noise like a chicken and yell soup. Bring me a couple of high balls and some synthetic gin, will you?" With which Bill gave the waiter a violent push and came straight toward me.

By this time, he was quite the center of interest. Some of the guests were laughing in great amusement; some appeared deeply annoyed.

I took one quick, appraising glance at Bill. I could have laughed had I been in less embarrassing surroundings. He wore full evening dress, a suit which was at least two sizes too small for him. He sported a huge white flower of some kind in his buttonhole and swung a stick in a gloved hand. On the back of his head was an opera hat with a big dent in it. He looked for all the world like a vaudeville comedian walking on to do his act.

He swung over to my side and dropped down upon the seat beside me.

"Say, Jim," he said in a hoarse whisper, "this is a live town. A guy could find a lot of fireworks round this village if he had a couple of matches."

"Bill!" I whispered, horrified. "What the devil are you doing here? Every one in the place is watching you. Are you drunk?"

He looked at me with disapproving eyes. "Jim," he said in a sorrowful tone," me and you have run round this world together for years, and I have never yet been loaded with banana oil or grape juice. Who's your friend?"

"Monsieur Garçon, the noted writer," I told him, flushing a deep scarlet. Garçon was looking at Bill as though he fancied he were seeing a caricature of some strange and little known animal.

"Glad to know you, kid," Bill murmured, reaching his hand across the table and seizing Garçon's. The little Frenchman looked dumfounded and tried to speak, but his words died on his lips. "If you can't speak English, say it with booze. I don't drink for a living."

Bill released Garçon's hand and leaned against the cushioned back of the booth. He lighted a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke across the table. He smiled at me. Then he turned his head and looked straight

over at Monsieur Paul Celestin. And as he looked, Monsieur Paul raised his eyes and gazed back at Bill.

In that brief moment I was conscious of a strange sensation. I seemed to sense some unspoken challenge between these two men. I cannot tell you what it was that created the feeling, because I knew beyond a doubt that neither knew the other.

Garçon said something in French. I scarcely heard it. I was watching Monsieur Paul. His level, steady gaze lingered upon the face of Bill Buddie as though he were taking in every line of Bill's countenance. And Bill was watching Monsieur Paul just as unwaveringly.

Then Bill dropped his eyes. He fished round in his pocket, took out his watch and glanced at it. I was startled and dismayed to hear him say in a loud whisper: "Say, Jim, that baby over there is loaded with Tiffany. Good lookin' dame, too. I'd like to take her out some night. Could you get me a pass?"

My heart seemed to stop beating. The buzz of voices in the room died away. For at the moment Bill had spoken, the orchestra had stopped playing and I am sure that his husky whisper had carried to every corner of the room. I think I must have turned pale.

I heard the dull scraping of Monsieur Paul's chair. I looked up, fairly holding my breath. The woman's eyes were blazing; I saw that she was in a rage. Her mouth was trembling a little; she was looking straight at Bill and he was looking at her.

I started to say something; the thought uppermost in my mind was to get Bill out of the café. But before I could speak, Monsieur Paul was standing at the end of our table. He was in a mounting fury. His tall, slender figure was rigid; his dark, handsome face colorless.

Garçon rose with unbelievable rapidity. He said something in French to Monsieur Paul, who hissed something back which I could not understand.

"Bill," I whispered under my breath, "you fool—you've started something."

Bill Buddie rose with the calm of a man standing alone in the middle of a desert. He yawned slightly and laid one hard, muscular hand upon the white tablecloth.

"Shoot, count!" he said in his guttural voice. "Name your poison—I use swords and tin guns."

Monsieur Paul made a lightning-like movement. One slim hand caught Bill by the throat and with amazing swiftness Bill was spun out from behind the table into the aisle. I shouted some unintelligible word and leaped from my seat. Garçon was waving his arms wildly and chattering in French. Almost every one in the room was standing, watching the scene.

"You will apologize to Madame Celestin, my friend," said Monsieur Paul in perfect English. "I think you are drunk—otherwise I would kill you."

Bill laughed shortly. He suddenly hunched his shoulders and I saw his mouth set in a straight line. He scowled a little and in the next instant his hand shot out and closed upon Monsieur Paul's wrist. There was a little struggle, a gasping of breath, a scuffling of feet. I saw the Frenchman's face turn deathly white; a look of great pain came into his eyes. A crash of glass and china followed; Monsieur Paul was hurled back against the table. Bill had him pinned down neatly, his shoulders planted squarely upon the table edge.

"Sure!" Bill snarled. "I'm full of American lemonade. I'm going to walk over there and apologize to the lady and if you make any bum moves, I'll crack your noodle with a bean-blower."

He turned his head sharply. "Jim!" he said. "Get this—quick!" He flung up Monsieur Paul's hand; held it. Swiftly I looked down. I saw a small, black mark between the man's knuckles; it appeared oddly to be the head of a wolf. And as I looked, I heard Garçon utter a snarl that sounded exactly like the snarl of a wolf.

I looked at him in astonishment; but he was only jerking his head back and forth violently and whispering unintelligible words in voluble French.

Bill let go of Monsieur Paul. The man straightened himself and looked at Bill with incredulous eyes. He brushed off his coat and carefully adjusted his cravat. He

bowed slightly to Bill and I saw a singular light in his eyes.

"*Monsieur,*" he said softly, "you are a genius. I will watch your progress."

Bill grinned a little. Then he turned and walked over to the table where the woman sat. He made an elaborate bow and apologized profusely—and to my sheer amazement, in French!

After a moment, the woman smiled and bowed. Bill removed the white flower from his buttonhole and presented it to her with great dignity. Then he came back to the table where I was standing and took me by the arm. He nodded briefly to Monsieur Paul. That gentleman looked at him with cool, calculating eyes and smiled faintly. Then he nodded slightly and walked back to his table and sat down.

A moment later several gendarmes came running into the café. The head waiter and the proprietor were on their heels. After considerable argument I showed my badge and some of my credentials—and five minutes later we were permitted to leave the place.

Bill took me by the arm and when we reached the door, the target of all eyes, I had the strange feeling that Monsieur Paul and his companion were watching us closely. But my only desire was to escape. I had left Garçon standing in the center of the aisle, still talking excitedly in French. Bill had certainly circused the evening for us.

Outside, I hailed a cab and pushed Bill into it with furious eagerness. I wanted to get him back to the hotel—to demand an explanation of his insane clowning.

"My God!" I said as I fell back upon the cushion with a groan. "Paris is no place for you."

"Say, Jim," he murmured, lighting a cigarette in the gloom of the slowly moving cab, "you made a wise crack when you brought me to this town. All a guy has to do here to make himself understood is to wave his arms, talk with his hands and order wine. Yes, sir, kid—this is my favorite side show. Say, did you read in the papers this evening where Mrs. Buxby-Barnes, the wife of the steel car magnate from Pittsburgh, lost her half-million dollar pearl necklace at a tea party over on somebody's boulevard this afternoon? You said it, Jim—you can certainly find the oysters to slap in this bird's nest."

"Bill!" I exclaimed. "Are you kidding me—or telling me there's been another jewel robbery in Paris?"

"Tell James to drive the car in a straight line, Jim," he said irrelevantly. "The guy's either full of hop or it's an eight-cylinder Ford we picked."

II.

For fully thirty minutes after I reached the hotel I sat in my room smoking a cigar. I was disgusted with myself. For I had found a sealed note awaiting me from Bennings, the Paris representative of the World Insurance Company. It told me clearly and forcibly what Bill had told me banteringly in the cab on our way from the café in Montmartre. Mrs. Buxby-Barnes, a wealthy American woman visiting Paris, had been cleverly robbed of a very valuable pearl necklace at a tea party in her villa on the de Villiers road, an exclusive suburb of Paris. It was insured by the concern which had appointed me their special representative and all the while I had been in blissful ignorance of the affair.

I rose and paced the room in nervous anxiety. I heard Bill splashing about in the tub in the bathroom. He had pulled off his evening clothes the moment we arrived at the hotel and had disappeared without a word.

I lighted another cigar and resumed my pacing. All the time I kept turning over in my mind the strange incident in the café, and the face of Monsieur Paul Celestin kept passing before my eyes.

Curiously enough, these mysterious jewel robberies had been happening in Paris for almost a year and the victims were, without a single exception, wealthy American women. The World Insurance Company had suffered enormous losses and I could readily understand young Bennings's anxious note and his rather sarcastic words directed toward my negligence and lack of knowledge of what was going on.

I smiled wryly. I should never have ac-

cepted the commission. Paris was a strange land to me; I was lost in the shuffle; I had no knowledge of the inner workings of the French underworld.

I finally decided that I would get Bennings on the telephone and tell him that I would give up the commission as special agent. I considered myself incapable of coping with sinister thieves who knew their own Paris so much better than I did.

I caught up my hat and hastily slipped into my coat. On second thought I concluded that it would be far better for me to hurry over to the office of the World Insurance Company and go over the matter with Bennings personally. I would state my position frankly and tell him that he was wasting time in allowing me to handle the case.

As I reached the door and started to open it, Bill came suddenly out of the bathroom and hurled a towel at me. It struck me in the back of the neck and I whirled around with a smothered oath.

For a moment I stared at him. Then I gave a startled cry and leaned against the door in astonishment. No human being who had ever known Bill Buddie would recognize him now. I recall that in the first swift glance at him, I was so confused that I instinctively reached for my revolver; but when he laughed, I knew who he was.

He was so thoroughly and so horribly disguised that he quite took my breath away. He was dressed in the outlandish, but withal, picturesque garb of the French Apache. He wore an old cap drawn down over his forehead and his face was dark and twisted into evil lines.

"Wait a minute, Jim," he said, walking toward me with a lithe, cat-like movement, "what's your hurry?" His voice was thick, almost unreal. So weird did it sound that it almost made me shiver. Now as never before in my life did I realize that Bill Buddie was a superb actor.

I took off my hat and mopped the perspiration from my brow. I tried to laugh, but the laugh froze upon my lips. I had seen Bill in many disguises, but this one was far too realistic to amuse me. He had the face of a demon; the cold, glittering eyes of the murderous Apache; the swift, tigerish movements of the beast of prey. I drew in my breath sharply.

"In the name of God, Bill!" I whispered huskily, "what are you up to now?"

He touched my arm; looked up at me; grinned a little.

"Listen, Jim," he said in a low voice, "you picked some fun for me when you handed me Paris. This is my old stamping ground. Down there in that hell-hole, kid—I lived there for a year. Among those devils that knife in the dark. I know 'em—all their dirty tricks. You know, I ain't been doin' much for you lately. But I'm the guy that likes originality. I'm goin' to knock 'em for a row of ash cans in this city."

"Where are you going?" I questioned. "Dressed like that?"

"Listen," he answered. "You lay off Bennings and stay right here in this room and go to bed. Don't ask any questions, but if I give you a ring to-night or within the next couple of days, shoot and shoot quick. See? I'll tell you where to come."

"Look here," I said suddenly, swiftly conscious of some impending mystery, "you can't go into the streets like that. You're bound to be picked up by the police."

"What—those lead soldiers," he exclaimed contemptuously. "Give me your coat and hat—maybe you'll get 'em back again."

I never argued with Bill when he was in one of those moods. I took off my coat and hat and handed them to him. He quickly slipped into the coat and jerked off the cap he wore, shoving it into his pocket. He clapped on my hat which was rather a good fit, then he brushed me aside and opened the door.

"So long, Jim," he said with a grim smile. He stopped long enough to get out a cigarette and light it, looked back at me with mocking eyes, then stepped into the corridor.

I stood in the doorway watching his retreating back. His calmness maddened me, but I knew it was useless to ask questions.

What was he up to? I closed the door and walked over to a chair near the window and sat down.

Suddenly a light tap sounded upon the

door. As my hand reached out to touch the knob, a small white envelope was slipped under the crack of the door. I picked it up and glanced at it. The envelope bore no inscription. I opened the door and looked out; the dimly lighted corridor was empty. There was no sound.

"Queer!" I muttered softly. Then I closed the door and bolted it.

I broke the seal on the envelope with nervous eagerness and drew out a heavy white card. In the center of the white space was the drawing of a black wolf. That was all. No word—only the black wolf with head uplifted as though mornfully howling.

The card fluttered from my hand to the floor. As I stepped away from the door the telephone on the little desk across the room jingled.

I ran over and caught up the instrument, uttered a low-spoken "hello" and waited almost breathlessly for the reply. It came —a hissing voice which sounded like the malevolent sputtering of two electric wires touched suddenly together. And all I heard was "Black Wolf!" Then the click of the instrument as the connection was broken.

"Good Lord!" I said, aghast. "What the devil sort of game is this?"

III.

Monsieur Paul Celestin waved his slim white hand with an arrogant gesture of contempt. He blew a thin ring of cigarette smoke from his mouth and watched it curl lazily upward under the dull glare of the heavy bronze lamp hanging over the big carved table where he was sitting.

Garçon leaned across the table and looked at Monsieur Paul for a long time in silence. After a moment, a faint smile lighted his face and he shrugged suggestively. With a slow, deliberate movement he reached into the inner pocket of his coat and drew out a small, flat leather case.

Monsieur Paul bent over, resting his face in his hands. The light from the bronze lamp flung a glow over his dark, handsome face; his languorous eyes lingered upon the leather case emotionlessly; the cigarette dropped from between his lips.

Garçon began to talk; softly, animatedly spoken French. His small, rat-like eyes were gleaming; the muscles of his face twitched and a little flush crept into his cheeks. In the stillness which followed, while Monsieur Paul and Garçon sat regarding the leather case, a woman slipped out of the shadows of the room. She glided over and came into the glow of the bronze lamp. A heavy odor of perfume trailed after her; her bare arms, white throat and bosom gleamed in the light. The black gown she wore rippled away from her superb figure in clinging folds.

She stood at the end of the carved table and leaned forward; her red lips parted in a smile. One hand moved out; her fingers closed over the case with tense impetuosity.

And with the closing of her fingers over the case, Monsieur Paul stirred slightly; his hand shot out and gripped the hand of the woman; he looked up into her face with his unwavering eyes. He shook his head. The woman shrugged and withdrew her hand. She dropped into a chair at the end of the table and laughed a little. Garçon turned his head and surveyed her with cold eyes.

There was another silence. Garçon looked down at the leather case and then up at Monsieur Paul, as if waiting for some order. Monsieur Paul nodded his head and smiled. And very swiftly, Garçon opened the leather case and withdrew from it a string of pearls. The woman at the end of the table rose with a stifled gasp. Garçon laughed lightly. Monsieur Paul permitted his eyes to rest upon the pearls without a flicker of visible interest. But his hand trembled a little as he reached out and caught up the string. He held the pearls under the light and surveyed them for a long time speculatively.

"You are clever—very clever, Garçon," he murmured in French. Garçon made a quick gesture and his face flushed with pleasure. "These are worth a half million dollars."

"Yes," said Garçon, "they are worth all of that. And it was so easy. Ah, American women are so simple to handle. Directly after the coup this afternoon, *monsieur*, I went to the café Vidon, where I met up with our charming friend who repre-

sents the World Insurance Company." Garçon chuckled and rubbed his hands together.

"But that other one—his friend, I think," cut in Monsieur Paul, "the one who acts so well—he is not to be taken lightly. He is a genius—a great genius. To-night, when he caught my hand, it was for a purpose. He was looking for the mark of the Black Wolf—and he saw it. That one—he should be put out of the way quickly. He has the eyes of a ferret, the smile of the devil, the face of an inspired fool. But he is no fool. He has the nerve and the calm of an iron man. Ah, I tell you, he has the strength of a steel trap. Garçon, I commission you to see that Ladieux knifes him within two days."

"That would be cruel—so cruel, Paul!" the woman murmured. She leaned forward and there was an odd look in her eyes.

"Fool!" said Monsieur Paul, turning upon her with a shrug. "And why?"

"He is a gentleman—a little of the gentleman, at least," the woman answered, dropping her eyes before Monsieur Paul's steady stare.

"Fool!" repeated Monsieur Paul; and swept the string of pearls back into the little leather case, snapped it shut with deft fingers and placed the case in his pocket. He rose and stood a tall figure in the dull light with the shadowed background of the room behind him.

"Come," he said curtly. "We will go into the den and talk with Ladieux. I cannot trust you—I cannot trust Garçon. You are so soft hearted."

"*Monsieur!*" cried Garçon, leaping from his chair. "You do me an injustice. I will see that Ladieux gets his orders."

"Come!" said Monsieur Paul in his cold, incisive voice. "You are both fools. And I am a man who knows his own mind. I will not be played with." He brushed aside a heavy drapery. A narrow panel in the wall swung open silently under his touch, showing the yawning abyss of a long, dark corridor.

Garçon walked across and entered the passage. The woman followed him. Monsieur Paul stepped through the panel after them and noiselessly closed it at his back. He laughed softly in the darkness. And his usually emotionless eyes were pin points of fire.

IV.

A LIGHT rain began to fall. It flung up a mist which soon grew into a heavy fog. It swept through the narrow, dirty little street in Montmartre, blotting out everything. Lights from the cafés and dives were obliterated in the impenetrable gloom; everything became a hazy blur.

A sinister figure with a cap drawn low over his eyes skulked in and out among the piles of débris and old wooden cases. He stopped now and then to listen, and to look steadily through the mist as though trying to brush aside the curtain of darkness that hung over him. Then he darted ahead again, moving with incredible swiftness. Once he stumbled and fell over an old ash can; he got to his feet with a muttered oath.

Presently he came to the front of a dilapidated old building. A faint light flung a flickering gleam through the rain and fog; he heard somewhere below him the steady beat of music and the slow shuffling of heavy feet.

The figure flattened itself against the side of the building. A door opened somewhere and a dull ray of light leaped out through the murky dusk. The door banged shut with the clang of a heavy chain. A deep and brooding silence settled down in the wind swept street. The sound of the music and the shuffling of feet had ceased.

Thirty minutes passed. An hour. The rain abated. A cold wind sprang up and steadily drove the mist and fog before it. The sinister figure still remained against the side of the building. He was watching the sky. It was clearing slowly.

At intervals he glanced up and down the narrow street. He was measuring time. A few lights began to pop up here and there, to cast heavy shadows. Below, in a region which seemed far underground, the music began to beat again, softly. The pounding of feet drifted up to his ears; the sound of muffled laughter, and once, the gurgling cry of a woman—

The man flattened against the wall of

the building smiled grimly. That was a fierce Apache dance going on beneath him; almost directly under the ground where he stood, in one of those dens of iniquity which thrive in Paris.

The figure shifted position and edged over toward the heavy door upon which were marked some strange figures. He was watching, waiting, with the keen, breathless suspense of the hunter.

Of a sudden a small window just above his head opened. A vicious face, a gleaming pair of eyes looked down upon the figure against the wall. The face came further out of the window; a pair of arms reached down silently; something bright and steel-like caught a ray of light and glinted wickedly. A hairy hand swung back to strike at the silent, shadowy figure below—

With the swiftness of a cat the figure moved; side-stepped; his body shot upward into space; iron fingers closed over the wrist of the hairy hand; a low, guttural moan sounded; the scraping of bodies; the rasping of breath. The ferocity of a man protecting his own life aided the man below. And slowly, inch by inch, snarling, struggling, the body of the man in the window began to slip through. A moment later a sickening thud sounded as he struck the hard pavement upon his head and lay motionless. A knife clattered to the ground; struck, rebounded and dropped into a tiny stream of water trickling along in the gutter.

The figure with the cap drawn over his eyes lifted one leg with a short, swinging motion and kicked out with the force of a pile driver. A moaning grunt followed; a sputtering of breath, the quivering of a body lapsing into sudden unconsciousness—

Then, with amazing agility, the figure leaped upward; his fingers closed over the window ledge; he drew himself up swiftly; crawled through the window and disappeared. And below, in the underground dungeon, the steady beat of the music went on to the rhythm of shuffling feet.

V.

Exactly an hour after Bill Buddie left, young Bennings came up to my room. And with him were a representative of the police and Mrs. Buxby-Barnes. She was a tall, angular woman possessing no claim to beauty. She was lavishly gowned and wore a trifle too much jewelry for good taste.

Bennings introduced her to me and she at once opened up in a tirade against the World Insurance Company and the utter inefficiency of its agents. The police representative had nothing to say, but shook hands with me in an aloof manner and immediately got out a notebook and began to write in it. Young Bennings was visibly excited, and when I attempted to explain to Mrs. Barnes that it was not the business of an agent to be upon the scene of every crime, she laughed sarcastically and asked me if I had ever been upon the scene of any crime.

"This is pretty serious," said young Bennings, dropping into a chair nervously and pulling at the ends of his small mustache. He got out a cigar and lighted it; puffed at it; then he rose, came over and touched my arm. I saw that there was undisguised anxiety written in his eyes. "Pretty serious," he repeated. "Mrs. Barnes's necklace was stolen this afternoon. There is no trace of it. It disappeared as have many other valuable jewels in Paris recently. The World Insurance Company stands an enormous loss, I tell you frankly, if Mrs. Barnes's necklace is not recovered; if these mysteries are not cleared up soon, the firm will be bankrupt."

Mrs. Barnes's gray eyes were pools of flame. She stood twisting her hands in a helpless, futile sort of way. I saw that she was on the verge of hysterics.

"You're a lot of brainless fools!" she cried in her high-pitched, rasping voice. "It seems incredible that you cannot do something. Are there no intelligent men left in the police department?"

"Madam," I said apologetically, "if you will give us a few days, I can assure you that we shall make every effort to recover your pearls."

"A few days!" she hurled back at me, beating her hands together fiercely. "How absurd!"

I glanced at the police representative, and though it may have been mere imagination on my part, I fancied that there was

a sarcastic smile hovering about his lips. He was standing across the room, still with the notebook in his hand. I said something to him rapidly, but he only smiled back at me in a fatuous manner and shook his head. He could not understand; or at least pretended that he could not.

The whole affair was getting on my nerves. What chance had I to solve this mystery? I spoke no French; I could not understand the language nor could I make myself understood.

"It will be necessary for me to cable in the morning," Bennings said at last in a nervous voice. "I hate to do it. But I've got to inform the firm that they're in for another big loss."

"You certainly have!" Mrs Barnes cut in angrily. "And even though they pay me the insurance, that will not satisfy me. I shall take pains to report the inefficiency of the company to the newspapers."

"Please!" Bennings begged, panic-stricken. "Allow us a little more time, Mrs. Barnes. We shall surely be able to do something to-morrow."

I nodded rather stupidly, strode over to the windows and brushed the draperies aside, looking down into the street. A heavy fog enshrouded everything. I turned away with a slight shudder. Indeed, a black curtain had fallen upon me. I thought of that strange card which had been shoved under my door; I thought of the café in Montmartre and of Monsieur Paul. Then I thought of Bill Buddie and of his queer actions—

Relief surged through me. Bill Buddie! Of course. What a fool I'd been! Bill was working. Silently, with all the cunning and genius of his indefatigable brain and energy—

I walked back to young Bennings and caught his arm eagerly. I shook him a little in my sudden impetuosity.

"Look here, Bennings!" I exclaimed. "Give me a little time. I am working on the case."

"How can you be working on the case standing here," he wanted to know. Bennings was a nice chap, and I realized his position only too well.

I laughed grimly. I looked at Mrs. Buxby-Barnes and she gazed back at me in great contempt.

"Madam," I said with considerable dignity, "I think that I can safely promise you the return of your necklace within a few days."

"Indeed?" the woman uttered harshly. "And what leads you to believe that?"

"Because," I told her, "I have working on this case the most expert crime investigator in the world. In matters of this kind, it is not well for us to talk too much."

The woman looked at me for a long, speculative moment. Then she came over and laid one hand upon my arm.

"If you recover my necklace," she said in a low, vibrant voice, "I will absolve the World Insurance Company from all blame, continue my jewel insurance with them—and pay you a reward of five thousand dollars."

"There is no question of a reward," I assured her with a smile. "It is my duty, as an agent of the World Insurance Company, to recover your pearls and to round up the clever gang of jewel thieves operating in Paris."

Suddenly Mrs. Barnes seized both my arms.

"I must get them! I must!" she cried. "At any cost. They did not belong to me. Do you understand—I am more or less of a thief myself. Not really, because the pearls belonged to my daughter. But she does not know they have been stolen. I borrowed them and I must get them back!"

I looked at her amazed. And as I was turning this new phase of the matter over in my mind the telephone rang. I took a swift step across the room and caught up the receiver.

"Hello!" I said. "Hello!" I listened intently. For a moment there was no sound; only the humming of the wire.

Then a voice came, sounding miles away. It was the voice of Bill Buddie.

"Hello, Jim," he whispered. "Listen, kid—I'll have that dame's beads by dawn. And I'll have a couple of wise-crackin' birds. Take it easy—and—look out!"—

The voice trailed off in a gasping, gurgling cry. There came to my ear the sharp report of a pistol shot. I heard it plainly.

It seemed to burst in my eardrum. I staggered back from the desk and let go of the phone, which fell with a crash.

Bennings and the police agent hurried to my side. I muttered something and pointed to the telephone. Bennings jerked it up, but I reached out and snatched the instrument from his hand. I listened, but there was no sound—only the faintly whispering wire. Bill! Where was he? That shot! Had some one killed him?

"Merciful heaven," I whispered, "some one got him—and I don't know where he is!"

Over and over in my brain, the sound of that shot kept bursting.

VI.

Silence. The deathly, ghastly silence of a closed, darkened room. The pungent odor of cigarette smoke; the sweet smell of a heavy perfume. And somewhere the faint, rhythmic beat of music; the monotonous shuffling of feet.

Across the room, heavy draperies moved slightly; rippled, parted. In the darkness a hand slipped through, clutching at the edge of the black curtains with long, tense fingers. A face with a cap drawn over the eyes peered into the gloom; keen eyes tried vainly to penetrate the shadows. A slow smile spread about the lips; a little chuckle came from the throat.

"Tough babies!" Bill Buddie muttered under his breath. "Yes, sir, those boys are real cut-ups." He laughed softly; slithered out from between the heavy draperies; stood poised for an instant in an attitude of expectancy, listening. His fingers twined round a small automatic with strained eagerness; his eyes narrowed; he seemed to stop breathing.

He began to move slowly and with great caution about the unfamiliar room. He stopped here and there to run hands over dark objects, to grope his way with the cunning dexterity of the expert prowler.

He grinned again. He was thinking of the man he had hurled into the street; of his skill in crawling up through the window, slipping along a narrow, stuffy passage; opening with great adroitness a small door; of sliding through into another room packed to suffocation with vicious looking men and girls with painted faces. He thought of the little French girl with the long scar running across her cheek; of sweeping her into his arms anud rushing into a maddening whirl; shouldering his way among those murderous human animals. No one had paid any attention to him. He was one of them. He bore all the marks of the death-dealing, skulking Apache of the nefarious underworld.

He remembered having seen Monsieur Paul Celestin and Garçon with the handsome woman in black. They had been sitting in a remote corner at a small table, conversing with a small, slender man whose eyes held the light of the devil, whose crooked smile bespoke the depraved brain of the killer, whose yellow teeth gleamed like the fangs of a hungry wolf. They had not noticed him; he had gone past them in a dashing sweep, like the swirl of a strong wind, moving with the terrific rolling beat of the orchestra drums.

He did not know that Ladieux, the young man with the teeth of a wolf, was rubbing his thin hands together and gloating over the prospect of knifing another man. He had not seen the swift smile which lighted the eyes of Monsieur Paul, nor had he seen the look of disapproval in the eyes of the woman.

He had flung the scarred-face little girl into the arms of another glowering Apache; had darted behind a huge pile of old boxes; stood waiting breathlessly. The wild dance had gone on; the music shrieked; the chatter of harsh voices and the shrill laughter of women filled the place.

Then before him, not more than two feet from where he stood, a trapdoor had opened, pushed upward by a stealthy hand. A dark face had come up through the yawning abyss; small, rat-like eyes were leveled upon him. With a leap he had spun across toward that opening; jumped squarely upon the shoulders of the man. A dull thud followed; together they had disappeared below the surface of the floor. There had been a struggle, but it was soon over. Bill Buddie had used the murderous tactics of the Apache.

He had risen from the floor, bruised and bleeding. Swiftly he had run up the short ladder and closed the trap. The music and the sound of shuffling feet had blotted out the noise of the struggle. He had dragged the man along a dark, vile-smelling passage, tossed him into a corner behind some wine barrels; caught his breath and had moved slowly along, feeling the sides of the wall as he went.

He had come into this room, this silent room through a narrow wall panel; had softly closed the panel; stood behind the draperies. He had no idea where he was. He was just playing another hunch.

"Yes, sir," he said to himself in the darkness, "if I don't get knocked cuckoo before dawn somebody will."

A sudden draft of cool air struck his face. He turned, startled. He listened; hung tense against the edge of a table. But there was no sound.

He was suddenly inspired with a great caution, a growing premonition which made him stand motionless, his fingers clutching the automatic. His heart began to beat swiftly like a whirring dynamo. A slow smile came to his lips, but he did not know that he smiled.

Presently he shook himself a little and slipped the automatic into his pocket. He moved his hands round over the surface of the big table and they came into contact with a telephone. He drew the instrument toward him slowly, noiselessly. He laughed shortly. Something in the humor of a telephone being here at his hand made him laugh.

He removed the receiver and listened. The wire buzzed. Then he repeated a number over and over to make sure that the operator understood it.

As he was talking, there came the sharp, metallic sound of a click in the darkness. A dull light flared up suddenly in a bronze lamp; it cast a glowing light over him with dismaying vividness.

He whirled round, but he was too late. His hand went instinctively to his pocket for the automatic, but before he could touch the gun, the tall, handsome Frenchman in evening clothes had fired.

Bill Buddie spun round and snatched at the edge of the table. He knew that he had been hit, but he also knew that he had not been dangerously hurt. With a moaning cry he sagged, slipped, fell to the floor without another sound. He lay very still, inert, seemingly a lifeless body.

Monsieur Paul Celestin laughed harshly. He stepped across and stood beside the table, looking down at the man lying at his feet. He uttered an oath in French and his eyes gleamed. The look in his face was the fierce look of the wolf. But even now, he had no idea of his victim's identity; he saw him only as a treacherous member of his own gang, an Apache double crossing him.

He tossed his gun upon the table and bent down to peer into the face of the dead man. He pulled the cap away from the fellow's eyes and as he gazed into them a strange light flared in his own.

"Ah," he murmured, "did I not say this one was a genius." He reached down to touch the face and as he reached, two arms closed about his neck with the grip of a steel trap. Monsieur Paul made no sound. He knew that he had been tricked, and he began to fight with the vigor and fury of a man fighting for his own life.

Over and over on the floor the two rolled, gasping, panting for breath. Neither spoke. Blood trickled down the neck of Bill Buddie and left a tiny trail across the rug.

"Black Wolf!" Bill whispered through bruised and swollen lips, as their bodies struck against the edge of the table. "You tried to kill me—you'd kill me now if you had the chance."

A sudden, gurgling cry; the rasping of a strangling breath; the twitching of a body; Monsieur Paul relaxed his hold. He turned over on his side and lay very still; the ferocity had been throttled out of him. He turned once again, his face buried in his arms; a low, choking cry came from his lips.

Bill Buddie rolled away and lay motionless. For a long time he remained that way. Then he crawled over to the side of the other man and his stiff fingers groped through the pockets of Monsieur Paul. They closed upon a small leather case. With

a painful little grunt Bill removed the case and placed it in his own pocket.

Then he began to crawl, slowly inch by inch, toward the black draperies concealing the panel in the wall. And faintly there came to his ears the dull, rhythmic beat of music and the steady shuffling of feet.

VII.

Dawn came. A leaden gray finger of light streaking across the sky. All night I had been up, wildly pacing the floor, wondering whether Bill Buddie was dead or alive. After the sound of that shot which had come to me over the singing wire, and after I had told Bennings what had happened, he ran out with Mrs. Buxby-Barnes and the police agent. There was nothing I could do, because I had no idea of where Bill had gone or where he might be found, dead or alive. And I felt instinctively that I should not leave the room, because there was a chance that another call might come.

Bennings had gone directly to the police and a short time later the prefect rang me up. I explained as best I could what had occurred. I told him of the card with the black wolf upon it which had been shoved under my door. That seemed to excite him greatly and he gave forth a volley of French which I could not understand. The last thing I can remember that he said was, "*Monsieur*, if your friend has tampered with the wolves of Montmartre, he is dead!" Then he rang off and left me to my own great uneasiness.

In the hours of ghastly silence in the hotel room I was in an agony of suspense. I knew that I should be doing something, but I was so helpless. And the prefect of police had plainly laid his cards upon the table when he expressed his fear of the denizens of Montmartre, that heinous little world of cutthroats and death-dealers.

With the coming of the dawn I went to the windows and flung them wide. I seemed to be suffocating. The gray light streaming in must have shown hideously upon my face and marked the fear and horror in it.

I heard a sudden sound of heavy feet in the corridor.

A heavy hand beat upon the door. It was unlocked and as I opened my lips to call out to whoever stood on the other side, the door swung violently open. Bill Buddie walked in. The most appalling and ghastly figure I have ever seen. One of his eyes was swollen shut; a tiny stream of blood trickled down his cheek; there was a bandage round his neck and I saw that it was soaked with blood which had dried. His clothes were literally torn off him; his mouth was bruised and swollen.

"Bill!" I cried; and ran to him. "In the name of God, what's happened to you? Where have you been!"

He swayed weakly in my arms and braced himself against the wall; he looked at me through his one eye.

"Listen, Jim," he said in a hoarse voice, "I'm all right. Let go of me and I'll sit down."

"Let go of you!" I almost shrieked. "You belong in the hospital."

"Let go!" he repeated savagely; and shook me off. He moved over to the bed and dropped down heavily on the edge of it.

"Bill," I pleaded, hurrying to his side, "you need medical attention."

"Hell!" he growled, running his hands through his hair. "I've had that. What I want pretty soon is some breakfast. Listen, Jim—this is short. Downstairs in the lobby the prefect of police is waiting for you. I wouldn't let him come up. Got six or seven lead soldiers with him—"

"Bill!" I cut in, catching his arm, "you're too weak to talk. You'll faint."

"Shut up!" he snapped harshly. "I never fainted in my life. Listen—that guy Celestin, the real Black Wolf, the head of the greatest jewel gang in Paris—I killed him."

"Killed him!" I whispered tensely. "Monsieur Paul Celestin—the Black Wolf? You—killed him!"

"Sure," grunted Bill with a slow, tired gesture of contempt. "That's what he tried to do to me. Well, he's gone and with him went the troubles of the World Insurance Company. Get me? He was the bird that did all the dirty work. Him and that Garçon lad."

"Garçon—you mean that he was one of them?" I asked incredulously.

"The same, Jim. Him and the beauti-

ful dame pulled most of the inside work. Society butterflies, Garçon givin' lectures at teas and dinners, the dame posin' as a countess. Say, she was a pip, though, Jim —I let her get away."

"Let her get away?" I echoed blankly. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"Last night. In Montmartre. In the hell den, kid. I spotted Celestin a week ago. Remember that afternoon when you got the report that the star sapphire was lifted from Mrs. Auxley's room over at the Trouville? I went over there and talked with the girlie. She had the hysterics and I pumped her good. Told me of meetin' a countess, of havin' taken lunch with her in her room at the hotel. I got a description of the countess. Saw her one day in a cab with that Paul baby. Started in to trail 'em round. Tough job, too. They used to meet up with the Garçon baloney and the three of 'em looked like a bum circus to me, doin' their jewel stuff for a side show act. Garçon was at Mrs. Barnes's yesterday givin' a lecture on something. He never wrote nothing in his life, but he's got a hell of an imagination. He lifted the necklace right off that old dame's neck and a little later when the rumpus started, he was the first one to call in the police. Slick little banana, ain't he?

"Montmartre? Say, I know the whole sawdust ring. They're a tough lot of boys, too. Went down there to-night. Got into the right place. Almost never got out, Jim. The Paul cutie nicked me when I was in the private meetin' place. Took a shot at me and rung me for a bull in the neck. Well, sir, that boy ain't goin' to trouble anybody again. I just naturally choked the gay life out of him. Had a terrible time gettin' out. I got to the police and after talkin' myself dry finally worked 'em up to goin' down there in Montmartre. Lead soldiers is right. Say, those phony oil cans are as afraid of the Apaches as a horse is of castor oil. They sent five or six hundred down with me, I guess. Lucky drive, though, Jim. Nobody had found Celestin. We cleaned out the place—say, it was a sight for you. They got Garçon and took Celestin to the morgue. They also got a load of jewels and busted up the joint. It looked like the battle of Bunker Hill in a cellar. They didn't get that beautiful girlie, though—no, sir. I got to her and slipped her out. You know, Jim, there was something about that baby I liked. Anyway, you know I got a weakness for the dames."

"But why didn't you call me—let me know what was going on!" I demanded.

"Didn't have time, Jim. And besides, I didn't want to see you get killed—you're too old to die. Called you once and that guy took a shot at me for using his telephone. Now, listen; you get busy and book passage back for New York. I know those birds down there in Montmartre and they'll get me sure if I don't move out of this town. Lot of the jewels the police got can be sorted out and returned. You're kayo with the insurance company. Run down and send me up some ham and eggs. I'll sleep a day or two, then we'll go home. Go down and see the guy which wears the prefect title—he thinks I'm batty. He wants to talk to you, and I guess there'll be some newspaper stories."

Bill rose and started across the room. He staggered a little and I leaped to catch him. He turned and looked at me with a grin distorting his bruised face. He brushed my hands aside.

"Get the ham and eggs, Jim," he said. "I'll take a bath. And here—" he reached into his pocket and took out a small leather case. He passed it to me. "That's the steel car dame's pearl necklace. Return it and ease her mind and soak the World Insurance for some real dough."

"Bill!" I cried, opening the case with eager fingers and looking at the handsome necklace which lay within, "Mrs. Barnes has promised a reward of five thousand dollars for this."

"Keep the change and buy a cigar, Jim," he said, shaking his head wearily. "I was just lookin' for a good time and got it. Don't overlook the chief of police or whatever they call themselves over here." He started again toward the bathroom door. He leaned against it, looking back at me. "You know, Jim," he added in a monotone, "I never liked that Paul baby from the time I first saw him. But I liked his wife

—it's a damn shame she's a crook—I could have learned to love her."

I heard the bathroom door slam shut. I heard the water running. And presently I heard Bill whistling.

I placed the leather case in my pocket and went out into the corridor. Bill has never given me the true details of his daring adventure in Montmartre and the den of the Apache wolves. All I learned I gleaned from translated newspaper stories.

Three days later we sailed for New York. We had grown famous in Paris—as Bill remarked, dangerously famous for him. There were no more mysterious jewel robberies in the gay city—at least none which affected the World Insurance Company. I charged them a goodly sum for my services and they were delighted to pay it.

On board ship Bill showed me one night an odd looking little silver ring which he wore on his finger.

"Jim," he said in a far-away tone, "that girlie gave it to me. I got a hunch that some time, some place in this old world, I'm goin' to meet her again. Yes, sir, she had the makin' of a great dame—that beautiful baby in black."

THE END

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CAN YOU SING A CHRISTMAS CAROL?

CAN you watch the Yule log burning
With the old time Christmas cheer
Listen to the fun and frolic
Of *your* children, and not hear
Little voices in the distance—
Maybe somewhere in this town—
Where the chimneys are too gloomy
For Old Santa to come down?

Can you light the colored candles
On *your* pretty Christmas tree
And be happy while *your* kiddies
Dance around in childish glee?
If you know one empty stocking
Will be hanging limp, forlorn,
With its baby owner sobbing
Out its heart on Christmas morn?

Can *you* sing a Christmas carol
On that Holy, Silent Night,
When the earth is filled with music
And the sky with Bethl'em's Light,
If, perchance, you have forgotten
Something that *you* might have done,
Just to make it seem like Christmas
To some more unfavored one?

You can sit beside the Yule log
Singing carols from your heart,
If you know that of your plenty
You have given up a part—
If you've given joy and gladness
You will find it on *your* tree,
Inasmuch as you have done it—
You have done it unto Me.

Sophie E. Redford.

Babble

By GEORGE J. BRENN

Author of "Voices," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

LUCIUS SMALLMAN, a money lender, is shot to death at midnight in his home while Quarrier, his chauffeur, is ringing the front door bell to warn him that Jones, a man he has wronged in a loan transaction, is prowling about the place. Charlie Fenwick, phonic criminologist, and his aid, Seth Boyden, who were sleeping upstairs in Smallman's home to protect him, following the receipt of a threatening letter, discover that his secretary, Dorothy Shellworth, was out of the house meeting Smallman's stepson, DeRoy Kent, at the time of the shooting. Jones is arrested, but Fenwick doubts his guilt. He discovers fifteen thousand dollars has been stolen from Smallman's safe. Later on Fenwick ascertains that telephone calls were made after the murder to several people, including Richard Philbrick, owner of a printing business, whom Smallman ruined. Mrs. Lawson, the housekeeper, also is found to be concealing something.

CHAPTER VII.

CROSS-EXAMINATION.

QUARRIER admitted the two telephone men, and at Fenwick's request summoned the the two women occupants of the house to the library. Dorothy Shellworth looked listless and tired, but Mrs. Lawson was wide awake, cool and deliberate.

"I don't like to keep you people up," apologized Charlie, "but I'm due on the job in the terminal room not later than nine o'clock, and if we can clear things up before that time, so much the better. There are some questions to be answered. First, which of you have keys to the front door?"

"I have," admitted Dorothy Shellworth.

"How about you, Quarrier? Mrs. Lawson? No? Very well. Please get your key, Miss Shellworth."

"It's in my room," murmured the girl, leaving the library and ascending the stairs.

"Now, how about the safe combination? continued Fenwick. "Who knew it besides Mr. Smallman?"

"No one knew it," answered Mrs. Lawson, somewhat reluctantly, "but I have it."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 13.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mr. Smallman once gave it to me, written on a piece of paper. In case anything happened, he said I was to turn it over to Mr. Forsythe. I read it at the time, but I couldn't understand it, and I've never looked at it since. I never opened a safe in my life."

"You still have the slip of paper?"

"Yes, Mr. Fenwick. It's in a box in my bureau drawer."

"Please, get it."

The housekeeper silently arose and left the room.

"How is it you didn't have a key, Quarrier?" asked Fenwick.

"No real need for it," answered the chauffeur, "living in the garage."

Fenwick nodded.

"And Mrs. Lawson?" he asked.

"I happen to know she never had one," advised Quarrier. "She's a rather old-fashioned woman in many respects, and except to do the marketing or to make an occasional visit, never left the house. When she did she always went out and in by the rear entrance. Miss Shellworth is younger, and has a certain amount of pride, I guess. She's always seemed to rank a little higher in the household than either Mrs. Lawson or me. I guess that's why she had a key and used the front door. Most people, you know, consider the rear door the 'servants' entrance,'" he chuckled.

"What do you mean when you say Miss Shellworth seemed to 'rank higher?'"

"Nothing very definite. This was really a democratic household, Mr. Fenwick. Mr. Smallman trusted all of us, but in different ways. He sort of divided responsibility, or trust. For instance, he told both Miss Shellworth and me that he had given the safe combination to Mrs. Lawson. He told me about the twenty-five thousand, but the others probably knew of it, too. He liked to talk about business matters to all of us, and to glory in his shrewdness and foresight. Miss Shellworth, being his secretary and stenographer, naturally knew much more about his business affairs than any of us, and he relied on her more. For that reason I always felt that she was the ranking employee."

As Quarrier concluded his lengthy explanation, Dorothy Shellworth reëntered the room.

"Here is the key, Mr. Fenwick," she answered, "but I can't make out what has happened in connection with it. I always carry it in my hand bag, but when I looked for it just now, it wasn't there. Instead, the ordinary key to the room across from mine was there. That key usually hung on a nail beside the door, so I looked there and found the key to the Yale lock on the front door."

Mrs. Lawson had followed Dorothy down the stairs, and listened with interest to the girl's story.

"Seems to me, Charlie," suggested Boyden, "that the person who locked us in that bedroom across from Miss Shellworth's got the keys mixed up!"

"No doubt it was the same person who ransacked my bureau drawer!" snapped Mrs. Lawson.

"You don't mean that the slip with the combination in it has disappeared?" gasped Fenwick.

"No," advised Mrs. Lawson, "but it has probably been consulted."

Dot Shellworth refused to meet the housekeeper's accusing glare.

"Was Albert Jones acquainted with the interior of this house?" demanded Fenwick. "Did he know which room was yours, Mrs. Lawson?"

"He did not," answered the housekeeper, crisply. "He was only here once, when the mortgage was executed, and he wasn't upstairs at all. However, if he got up there, he couldn't help telling who the different rooms belonged to. Any one could see that Mr. Smallman's room was a man's room. As for the others, one is pretty, bright and cheerful, while the other is drab and plain. I reckon it wouldn't need a detective to say which belonged to a young girl, and which to an older, decent woman."

The statement gained in malice by the dispassionate manner in which it was made. Dorothy Shellworth quailed before the older woman's veiled innuendo.

"Why do you treat me so, Mrs. Lawson?" she cried. "I've never harmed you in any way."

"Nor Mr. Smallman, neither?" queried the housekeeper.

The girl was miserably silent, and Fenwick came to her rescue.

"Did Mr. Smallman make a will?" he asked.

This time it was Quarrier who answered.

"He told me that he had," advised the chauffeur. "It was on an occasion when I had been able to render him a particularly valuable service, and he told me that he had remembered me in his will. I imagine that he referred to a small, nominal bequest."

"He said nothing about the disposition of the bulk of his fortune?" pumped Charlie.

"Nothing," responded Quarrier. "I always imagined, however, that he would relent in his feelings toward his stepson, and that DeRoy would come in for the entire fortune."

"H-mph," sniffed Mrs. Lawson.

"Do you happen to know anything about his will, Mrs. Lawson?"

"Something. I remember the day he went to Mr. Forsythe's office in New York to make it. When he returned to Springfield he told me he had remembered all of us except DeRoy Kent."

"You do not like DeRoy, Mrs. Lawson?"

"Not particularly."

"What do you know about the will, Miss Shellworth?"

"Only what the others have told you. Mr. Smallman frequently told me that he would take care of me in his will. I never wished for a penny of his money except what I earned, however, and if he has left me any I won't touch it."

"I see. Do any of you know anything about a Richard Philbrick?"

"Never heard the name," announced Quarrier.

"I know about him," admitted Mrs. Lawson. "It was something that happened before Mr. Smallman thought of having a chauffeur or a secretary. Some business matter that was fought out in the courts. I remember there was a lot of money at stake, and Mr. Forsythe came to see Mr. Smallman about it almost every day for a week. I never saw Richard Philbrick, but I know Mr. Smallman considered him unfriendly."

"Thank you," acknowledged Fenwick. "That jibes with my own information."

"I'm so glad," murmured the woman, and Fenwick smiled at the trace of sarcasm in her comment.

"Is your husband living, Mrs. Lawson?" he asked.

For the first time the housekeeper's composure deserted her.

"Don't you know he's not?" she snapped nervously.

"Answer my question, please," he ordered.

"I've been a widow nearly thirteen years," she advised angrily.

"Then who is Joey?" he demanded.

She laughed shrilly, and although surprised, apparently recognized the fact that she had him at a disadvantage.

"So that's it, eh?" she jeered. "A trick, was it? Well, since you're so smart, suppose you find out. While you're at it, you might find out who ransacked my papers, to get the combination of the safe! You might find out where the fifteen thousand dollars went! You might learn how the innocent, quiet young lady got the keys mixed! Those are the things you don't want to know. What do you care for a poor, decent woman trying to make an honest living, or a frantic, nervous young father who stands to lose the roof over his head? Not a thing! But the baby-faced minx, the quiet, designing little hussy who can pull the wool over your eyes—she's the one who must be protected at all costs! She's the—"

"Stop it, Mrs. Lawson!" exclaimed Quarrier, angrily. "Miss Shellworth's perfectly right when she says she's never harmed you in any way, and you've no call to say those things about her. I won't have it."

"Oh, you won't, eh!" she flared. "Have you no brains? Don't you see that this make-believe detective would be after you, right now, just as he's after me, if it weren't for the fact that you were not in the house when Lucius was killed? Why doesn't he spy on her and her telephone conversations.

instead of on me? Don't you know what she is?"

"I do," thundered Quarrier, his face livid. "She's my wife, and I want you to hold your tongue!"

He hurried to the girl's side, and took her hand.

"Don't worry, dear," he counseled. "There's no reason why they shouldn't know."

Mrs. Lawson laughed hysterically.

"Your wife!" she jeered. "Since when, I wonder?"

"Since last week," disclosed Quarrier. He turned to Charlie and added: "I meant to tell you before this Mr. Fenwick. There was a very good reason why I couldn't. I'll explain later."

"See that you do!" challenged the housekeeper. "See that you do! As for me, not another word do you get out of me—not one."

She sailed out of the room. Dorothy cried softly, while Quarrier endeavored to quiet her. Both Fenwick and Boyden smiled.

"As it sez in the fust chapter o' Titus, tenth verse: 'There are many unruly and vain talkers,'" quoted Boyden.

"And if they talk," commented Fenwick, "sooner or later those who listen carefully will hear something to their advantage. It's a funny thing, Seth, but there's never been a murder case yet that did not disclose an accompanying array of family skeletons, clandestine meetings, secret marriages and all the other little touches that the yellow papers glory in. I'm sure that there are additional surprises still in store for us. Hello, there's the telephone bell ringing." He went to the switchboard and plugged in.

"Fenwick," he announced.

"Police Headquarters," responded Flanagan. "We've heard from Philly on this fellow Philbrick. They couldn't give us much dope, but they found out that he was at home last evening and didn't leave until about three o'clock this morning, when he received a telephone message. The place he was staying at was a boarding house, and the boarding mistress says that Philbrick packed his things, paid his bill, and said he might never return. He requested that his mail be forwarded to the World apartment house, Riverside Drive, care of Mr. DeRoy Kent."

"Good enough, Flanagan," commended Fenwick, and he hung up. "Folks," he announced, "we're going for a ride. I'd like you all to come along. Get your coats and hats."

"Where to?" asked Quarrier.

"New York. There's work to be done—work for everybody. Seth will drive us in the chief's car. I'll drop off at Newark. I'll outline each one's job on the way. It's five o'clock, so let's hurry."

"I've something to explain to you first," objected Quarrier.

"Later on, in the car, old man," requested Fenwick, slapping him jovially on the back.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WOMAN WHO DIDN'T KNOW.

THE chief's car was of the five-passenger touring type, and Boyden dug out the side curtains from under the rear seat and put them up.

"'Tain't so cold for the middle o' January," he explained to the others as they came out of the house, "but it's goin' to be cold drivin' the way I'm aimin' to step on it."

"You'll have to, Seth," commented Fenwick. "I expect you to be in Newark by five thirty, and in New York by six."

"I'll be there, if the ferry don't hold me up," promised Boyden. "Git in, folks."

"Better get in front with Seth, Mrs. Quarrier," suggested Charlie. "It will be warmer."

The girl quietly obeyed, Quarrier took the rear seat with Fenwick, and the car slipped away.

"I want to tell you about Dorothy and me," began Quarrier, almost immediately. "You probably know that DeRoy Kent admired her, and would have liked to marry her. She was not attracted to him, however, in just that way, and Mr. Smallman did all he could to discourage the affair. Dorothy knew how I felt about her, and

was not unresponsive, but she saw no reason for a hasty engagement or marriage.

"Kent saw how the land lay, and didn't annoy her or me. He's a really likable chap, and I know he'd do anything he could for either of us. Well, during the last few weeks I think I put a little more ardor in my courtship, for Dorothy agreed to marry me. I didn't give her a chance to change her mind, you may be sure, and just a week ago to-day we ran over to River City and were married. We agreed to keep it secret for a while, for a number of reasons. That's all there is to that. Well, sir, when this terrible thing happened to Mr. Smallman and Dorothy walked into the house at a time when we all thought she was up in bed, I'll have to admit that my heart turned over a bit violently. Then, a few minutes later, you brought out the fact that Dorothy had probably left the house to meet DeRoy Kent. I never realized until that moment what it meant to be jealous. I picked her up when she fainted, carried her up to her room, and stayed until Mrs. Lawson restored her to consciousness. I couldn't bring myself to question her then, however, and I went downstairs with doubt lurking in my mind and gnawing at my heart!"

"An extremely unpleasant situation for a young married man," agreed Fenwick.

"It was," affirmed Quarrier. "I waited until after you and the chief had left with Albert Jones and then I questioned her. It was cruelly unjust for me to suspect her of anything wrong, for she's the soul of honor. Well, Mr. Fenwick, this is what I learned: Dorothy wanted Kent to be the first to know of her marriage. He called her on the telephone yesterday, as he did occasionally, and she funked it, although she let slip that she had some terribly important news for him. He insisted on seeing her for a moment or two last night, so they agreed that he was to come to Springfield. She didn't want to antagonize Mr. Smallman, so she pretended that she wasn't going out.

"Later on she unlocked and unbolted the rear door and slipped out, leaving it unlocked, of course. They met at the railroad station and went for a walk, during which Dorothy told DeRoy of our marriage. He took the news like a good sport, offered his felicitations and asked about our plans. Dorothy told him that I expected to be given the management of one of Mr. Smallman's branch offices very soon, at which time we would announce our marriage and begin housekeeping in a modest home of our own. She never did like Mr. Smallman's business, and said as much to DeRoy. Of course, there was no love lost between the old man and his stepson, and DeRoy fancied he could put one over on Smallman. It was in the shape of a suggestion that Dorothy accept a temporary position with his brokerage house as stenographer, and that I take employment with them as a bond salesman.

"DeRoy is a convincing talker and Dorothy is easily influenced. She demurred at first, feeling sure I would object to the arrangement, as I would have. Well, he won her over, and nothing would do but that she call up Smallman, break the news to him, ask for me, and then the three of us would go to New York at once. I might add that the whole fantastic affair is typical of DeRoy Kent. He's impetuous, impulsive, and will never grow up."

"He figured that it would cripple and annoy Mr. Smallman to lose two trusted lieutenants in the shape of his secretary and chauffeur, without notice?" queried Fenwick.

"Righto. So Dorothy went to the coin box telephone kiosk at the station and called up, just before or about the time I had aroused Mr. Smallman. You will recall that I saw Jones prowling about the house, but lost him in the darkness. As I reconstruct the affair, Jones found the rear door open, sneaked in and shot the old boy while Dorothy was talking to him. That's pure deduction, however; I'm not sure. Dorothy heard the shot over the phone and voiced her suspicions. She told DeRoy about the threatening note his stepfather had received, and was shrewd enough to realize that DeRoy's presence in town at that hour might involve him in the affair. She prevailed upon him to take the first train back to New York, and she returned to the house alone. Those are the facts

as she gave them to me several hours ago, and I want you to know that I have absolute confidence in her story."

Fenwick was silent for a few moments, during which he could catch the faint whispers of a conversation in the front seat between Boyden and Dorothy.

"It seems strange, Quarrier," he pointed out, "that with all the later developments in the case, the substantial evidence always comes back to Albert Jones as the man we are after. Do you really think he did it?"

"I do," asserted the chauffeur seriously. "I never had a doubt of it until we found that only a part of the money in the safe was missing. If that point is cleared up I believe the rest will be easy."

"Perhaps you're right," conceded Fenwick. "How about Mrs. Lawson?"

"I know you'll laugh at me, Mr. Fenwick, but I can't conceive of any woman shooting a man down in cold blood. Mrs. Lawson has never been a very friendly woman. I imagine it's extremely hard to win her confidence. On the other hand, I never knew before your interview with her that she possessed all the requirements necessary to qualify as a spitfire, or that she could be so vindictive. She's a puzzle to me. I couldn't tell whether she flared up to clear her own skirts, or because she really believed that Dorothy was responsible."

"It's a queer case," yawned Fenwick. "Two women who are undeniably far from being the type that might resort to a crime of violence, and a man who strikes me as being undisputably in the same class! Perhaps I'll get a better slant on the whole affair when I see Kent."

"You expect to see him?" queried Quarrier.

"Sooner or later. By the way, you telephoned Forsythe?"

"Yes. Shortly after you left the house to go to police headquarters. He grumbled a bit at being aroused at such an unearthly hour, but before we finished talking he thanked me for calling him and promised to be in Springfield by ten o'clock this morning. He's a queer bird."

"You know him, do you? Of course; I remember you told me about meeting Mr. Smallman through the impression you made on Forsythe. I'm glad of that, because I want you to handle that angle of our work in New York. You'll take Mrs. Quarrier with you, of course."

"What am I to do?" asked Quarrier.

"Two things. First, I want you to learn as much as you can from him about this Richard Philbrick, who left Philadelphia to-night for New York. He's involved in the case in some way. Then I want you to establish the fact that there's really a will, and to learn how soon it can be read. It may not be entirely ethical for a lawyer to give such information, but I understand that Forsythe is not exactly an ethical lawyer."

"He isn't," agreed Quarrier with a smile. "Except for Mr. Smallman's business, Forsythe's practice is entirely criminal law. I understand he's what the crooks call a 'mouthpiece.'"

"You mean that he accepts retainers from crooks with the understanding that he's to protect them in case they fall into the clutches of the law?"

"That's the way I understand it, Mr. Fenwick. Mr. Smallman once told me that Forsythe makes thirty thousand a year in that way. I know him pretty well, and it may be that I can even learn something about the provisions of the will. How would that be?"

"Fine—if you can do it," applauded Fenwick. "Seth, have you been listening?"

"You bet. Didn't miss a word, Charlie." Fenwick chuckled.

"I guess you're right, Seth. You've got the sharpest pair of ears in the telephone game! I want you to go to DeRoy Kent's. It's the World apartment house on Riverside Drive. Get all the general information you can, but inquire particularly about Richard Philbrick. Understand?"

"As it sez in the fourteenth chapter o' Numbers, twenty-eighth verse: 'As ye have spoken in mine ears—I will do.' What are you gonna do, Charlie? This is Broad Street, Newark."

"I'm going to leave you at Bridge Street, and you're going on to New York. I've

a stop to make in Woodside. Then I'll take a Hudson Tube train to New York and stop at police headquarters to consult some records. After that I'll join you at Kent's. If anything important breaks, call me at police headquarters or leave a message for me. Here's Bridge Street. Let me out. Warm enough, Mrs. Quarrier? Perhaps you'd like to sit back here with your husband. You'll soon be in New York."

"Thank you," murmured the girl gratefully, as the car pulled up to the curb. Fenwick threw a door open and assisted her as she changed seats.

"So long, folks," he shouted. "Remember, Seth; New York by six o'clock. See you later at Kent's."

He waved his hand and the car pulled away. The air was chilly and the sky was slate gray. There was little traffic on Broad Street, either pedestrian or vehicular. He walked to the Berwick Hotel, two blocks north, accosted a sleepy taxi driver and gave him an address on Woodside Avenue. In ten minutes he was at his destination, a modest frame dwelling of the two-family variety. He instructed the driver to wait, ran up the steps, and consulted the name plates below the electric bell buttons. Pushing the lower one marked "Mrs. K. Cornell," he waited. There was a sound of hurried movement within, and finally a stout woman in a faded pink kimono opened the door the space of a few inches and peered out suspiciously.

"Mrs. Cornell?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"I don't want you to be alarmed, Mrs. Cornell. I'm a police officer from Springfield. May I come in?"

"Heaven help us!" ejaculated the woman nervously. "I knew it. Disgrace for all of us, maybe. Come in, sir."

He followed her into a tawdry parlor.

"You know what's happened, of course," he began.

"Not a word," she countered without hesitation.

"I mean in Springfield."

"Not a word," she repeated.

"Sarah telephoned you twice, didn't she?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes; so she did. I see you know. What do you want of me? Why don't you ask my sister about anything you want to know?"

"Because she's too stubborn for her own good. You know that, and you can save her a great deal of trouble if you will."

"How?" demanded Mrs. Cornell.

"By answering a few questions, or if you prefer, by telling in your own words just what you know."

The woman burst into tears.

"I don't know a thing," she complained. "I hardly ever see my sister. Once in a while she calls me up on the phone. It was like a slap in the face when she told me Mr. Smallman was killed, and they didn't know who did it. It worried me, I can tell you, when she said they might even pin it on her because she was entitled to a third of his estate. But I can't tell you who did it, can I? I'd help her out if I could. It won't do any good, will it, for me to say that she didn't take that money, even if she did have the numbers to open the safe? Why do you come to me? Haven't I trouble enough with my little Joey, walking with a crutch and a brace because his leg's paralyzed?"

"Of course you have," consoled Fenwick quietly, but secretly elated. "We can't go on having hard luck all the time, Mrs. Cornell. Sooner or later it must change for the better."

"I hope so," breathed the woman, fervently. "Sarah's been so good to me and Joey that she's deserving of better fortune. Think of it, slaving for years for that selfish old man, never buying a gay dress or bonnet, never even going to a movie. What a life! And then marrying him, when he urged her, and agreeing to keep it secret because the old miser pretended he didn't want gossip about the town. 'Twasn't gossip he feared; he was afraid she might spend a penny or two, as mistress of his home.

"Imagine her, with no more standing in her own home than a poorly paid servant. Is it any wonder she hated him quietly, and waited patiently for this day to come, with freedom and payment for all of it? Is it any wonder, I ask you?"

"It is not," agreed Fenwick. "She's a wonderful woman to have stood it so long. And close-mouthed, too. There aren't many women would have been able to keep their marriage a secret for—let's see—how many years is it?"

"Four," answered Mrs. Cornell.

"Yes, four years, after having been his housekeeper for eight. Think of that. Well, when this thing clears up she'll be better fixed, without a doubt."

"I hope so," murmured Mrs. Cornell, wiping away her tears. "I'm sorry there isn't anything I can do to help her out, but I'll appreciate it if you can help her, mister. God knows I don't know a thing that might assist you."

"I see you don't," admitted Fenwick, "so I'll be going. Thank you, Mrs. Cornell. Good day."

"Hudson Tubes," he told the driver, as he returned to the taxi.

"Those two women are sisters," he meditated, on the way to the station, "but what a difference there is in their babbling!"

CHAPTER IX.

SETH GETS AN EARFUL.

"HOW'LL we arrange things?" queried Boyden, as he guided the car with steady hand up Fifth Avenue.

"Forsythe's apartment is on East Twenty-Seventh Street," advised Quarrier. "Suppose you drop Dorothy and me there and go on to Kent's place, up on the Drive."

"Good enough," agreed Seth, "but it seems an ungodly hour to git a man up."

He halted the car presently in front of the pretentious apartment hotel designated by Quarrier, and the young couple got out.

"We'll telephone or join you later," suggested Quarrier, "at Kent's."

Boyden nodded and started back for the avenue. It was not yet six thirty and the traffic presented no difficulties, so that he was able to maintain a fairly even rate of speed in his drive uptown. Arriving at the World apartment house, he approached the telephone operator and inquired for Mr. DeRoy Kent. The operator rang Kent, advised him that a Mr. Seth Boyden of Springfield wished to see him, and was instructed to show the visitor up.

"This way, sah," invited the colored boy, leading the way to the elevator, and in a jiffy Seth was at the eighth floor and found Kent's apartment without trouble.

"Come in," said a voice, in answer to his knock, and he pushed open the door. He was barely inside when something crashed down upon him with terrific force, and he lost consciousness.

When he recovered some time later it was with a throbbing sensation in the head and a feeling that he had lost his sight and control of his limbs. He tried to cry out, found that he could not utter a sound. There seemed to be a dull murmur of conversation in an adjoining room. Motionless, he gathered his dormant perceptions, and established to his own satisfaction that he was lying upon a rug, bound, gagged, and blindfolded. His assailants had apparently made a workmanlike job of rendering him *hors de combat*.

The voices drew nearer, and Seth decided that they were either strange to him or that he was not yet sufficiently recovered to recognize them, if familiar.

"The old fellow's still out," commented a not unpleasant masculine voice. "Too bad we had to do him in."

A hand touched his face and fumbled a bit before removing the blindfold.

"Yep—still dead to the world," reiterated the voice. Boyden discreetly kept his eyes closed and his ears open, determined to profit by anything he might hear. The same voice indulged in a laugh.

"What's the joke?" demanded another voice.

"That's Quarrier," thought Seth.

"The joke is our little friend on the floor there," advised the first speaker. "I believe you said he was a telephone trouble-shooter?"

"That's right."

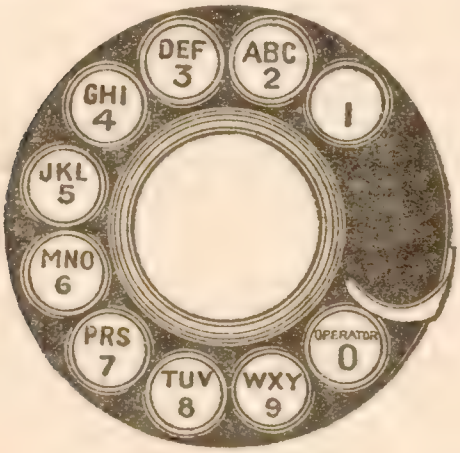
"Well, he found telephone trouble all right, if that's what he was looking for. And you say that he works for a detective who does all his work by telephone?"

"That's what I said," affirmed Quarrier.

The first speaker guffawed again.

"The irony of fate," he observed. "He reached the door before I was prepared to handle him, and I didn't know what to wallop him with. My eyes rested on the telephone instrument on that little table by the door, so I picked it up and as he came in I gave him a judicious whack with the base of it. He went out like a shot! Does all his work by telephone, does he? Well, so do I! Here's where I do some more."

Boyden knew that the Hudson central office was what is known as a "machine switching" or "automatic" central office, the subscribers served from it obtaining their own local calls by "dialing" them on a disk attached to the base of the instrument, thus eliminating the need for a telephone operator. He had studied and was perfectly familiar with this type of equipment and in his mind's eye there flashed before him an image of the dial:



As plainly as though the actual attachment stood before him, he could visualize the black metal frame with its ten holes, its white metal finger stop, and the red figures and black letters which appeared numerically and alphabetically on a white surface beneath each hole. He knew that it was necessary, when making a local call, to dial the first three letters of the central office name, followed by the four digits of the number desired. He knew that to dial a number therefore required seven operations, each consisting of placing the finger in the hole through which the significant letter or number could be seen, pulling the dial around until the finger struck the finger stop, and removing it in order to allow the dial to return to rest. But Boyden knew something more important than these elementary principles of operating an automatic telephone. He was familiar with the sound resembling the noise of a fishing reel with the "click" on, which results from the dial returning to normal each time it is released. The number of clicks varies with the particular number or letter called. The figure 1, which is nearest the finger stop, results in only one click, while the figure 0, or zero, representing the tenth hole away from the finger stop, sends forth ten clicks, when dialed.

Fenwick had stated that Boyden had the keenest sense of hearing of any man in the telephone industry. While not strictly true, since no such sweeping test had ever been made, the statement had some basis in fact. Six months earlier the two had attended a demonstration of the audiometer at the West Street Laboratories of the Bell System in New York City. This is a device evolved by telephone engineers, composed of vacuum tubes, receivers, coils and adjustable resistances, and was designed to measure deafness with scientific accuracy. Boyden had characterized it as a machine for determining "How much is an earful?" and cheerfully consented to a test of his hearing. The results had astonished the scientists, for they showed, despite his age, that Seth's ears were sensitive to over 300,000 pure tones.

This incident flashed through his mind as he lay motionless on the floor, his eyes closed, waiting for the owner of the strange voice to make good his promise to "do some more work by telephone." In another minute he could distinguish the "dial tone," a steady humming sound which is evident when the receiver is removed from the hook and the line is ready for use. Then ensued the sound of the dialing, seven successive times, with Boyden counting and memorizing the clicks as the dial returned to rest each time. He repeated the seven-digit number over and over, mentally, while waiting for the called party to answer and the conversation to proceed.

"222-3465," he rehearsed. "222-3465."

"Hello," said the strange voice, which by this time Seth had decided belonged to DeRoy Kent. "I wish to make a reservation. I'd like a suite of two bedrooms and parlor, for Mr. Harry Fewsmith and daughter. They'll be there within half an hour. O.K? Good."

"That's that," continued Kent, after replacing the receiver. "It's a modest place, a bit out of the way, and you folks can stay there without fear of being found until we decide what had best be done. Quarrier and I will join you later. Don't forget the traveling bag, and keep a steady eye on it. It isn't every one, Dot, who can go riding around New York with a bag full of money. Get right downstairs and hail a taxi. You'll have one sooner that way than if we telephoned. Hurry. Quarrier will stay with me, and we'll leave as soon as we make a telephone call."

"Is Mr. Boyden all right?" queried a feminine voice anxiously.

"He looks awfully quiet and white," put in Quarrier, dubiously. "Poor old boy! I'd be worried if I were in your shoes, Kent."

"Pooh," announced that breezy youth, facetiously. "What's another murder more or less? He's all right, I tell you. I not only know how to hit them, but where to hit them. Boyden will be stirring in a few minutes. Here, take the bag and be off."

Seth could hear the door swing shut as two members of the party departed. Kent returned to the telephone.

"You have two phones?" queried Quarrier.

"Yes. The one in the other room is connected to the houseboard. Never use it if I can help it. Poor service. Operator's always riding on the elevator when I want him, or listening in, when I don't. This is my own phone. Ah, here's the dial tone."

The dialing began and once more Seth counted. The combination of clicks on this occasion resulted in "267-1313," and Seth promptly memorized the number.

"Hello, Bill," began Kent, when his party answered. "This is DeRoy. I'm coming down right away with Quarrier. I know you're busy, but we've got to have a confab. Hell's popping for fair, and you're the only bird can help us out. Yep; right away. So long."

He jammed the receiver on the hook.

"Get your hat and coat, my blushing bridegroom," he ordered. "We're off. Guess I did hit the old trouble-shooter a bit harder than I thought. Well, we'll leave him here, and give him a sporting chance."

He removed the gag from Seth's mouth and loosened the cords about his wrists.

"There you are, old timer," he murmured. "Good luck to you."

The two men left the room, and the lock on the door snapped behind them. Seth's eyes opened instantly, and he sat up, tearing at the thongs about his wrists. They were easily unknotted and he attacked those about his feet and legs next. Before attempting to arise he produced the stub of a pencil from his pocket, and on a pocket-worn envelope he scribbled:

222-3465
267-1313

Next he glanced at his watch. It seemed as if hours had elapsed since he entered Kent's apartment and was made the victim of the sudden, unexpected attack, yet his cheap, clumsy timepiece indicated that it was not yet eight o'clock. He had been in the apartment less than an hour.

Seth arose and limped about the room to restore circuluation and to shake off the stiffness resulting from his bonds and the uncomfortable position he had been compelled to maintain upon the floor. Then he went to the telephone, dialed Spring 3100, and asked to be connected with Inspector Corson's office. Despite the early hour the inspector was at his desk and recognized the old trouble-shooter's voice immediately.

"Hello, Seth," he greeted, cordially. "Didn't expect to find me here so early, did you? Well, that untiring boss of yours routed me out and made me scurry down here ages ago. I fixed him up and he's just left for the American Telephone and Telegraph Building at 195 Broadway. He expected to hear from you before he left, and when he didn't, I promised to take any message you might leave. Charlie has told

me about the case. What happened to you?"

"Waal," said Seth. "I didn't make out so good, but then agin, I didn't make out so bad, either. Trouble is, you can't interview a man, if, as it sez in the thutty-fifth chapter o' Numbers, sixteenth verse, 'he smites you with an instrument of iron.'"

"He knocked you out?" gasped Corson. "With a blackjack?"

"Naw," answered Seth, with deep disgust apparent in his tone. "Not with a blackjack. Kent's something like Charlie Fenwick; he does most of his work by telephone. When I walked into his apartment he hit me on the head with a telephone!"

The inspector laughed so heartily that Seth felt constrained to rub the lump on his head, accompanying the action by a rueful expression that was ludicrous in the extreme.

"And you had no reason to expect anything but a friendly reception, eh, Seth? Wonder what happened?"

"I'll tell you what I think. Kent's mixed up in this thing more'n we know. Charlie assigned me to interview him, while the Quarriers were to see Mr. Forsythe on East Twenty-Seventh Street. I dropped them there, and came on up here to Kent's. I reckon they double-crossed me. Instead of goin' in to see Forsythe, they must have beat it up to Kent's in time to warn him. Then he knocked me out, and the four of 'em have beat it."

"Four, eh? So Philbrick was there?"

"I reckon so, although I didn't see him."

"Well, Seth, if you want me to turn a man or two loose to find them for you, I'll be glad to coöperate."

"Thanks, inspector, but I kin find them any time I've a mind to. I've got a system, an' I ain't through with this Kent whipper-snapper yit. If you see Charlie before I do, I want you to tell him two things. Fust, jest say that Dorothy is with Mr. Philbrick, and they've got the fifteen thousand with 'em. Next, you tell him that I heard Kent say: 'What's another murder more or less?' Got that?"

The inspector whistled.

"So that's it?" he murmured. "You did learn something, didn't you Seth?"

"I'll say so. Looks to me like a case where the hull crowd is in cahoots and nobuddy is innocent. I'd have sworn by that Quarrier lad. A nice, likable, mild-mannered boy he is, and yit he hangs around with this gang o' rascals and seems to approve of what they're doin'. Leastways he don't object none. I ain't so sure, though, that he ain't slicker than they think."

"Perhaps you're right, Seth," agreed Corson. "At any rate the net seems to be closing. Charlie went away from here whistling, and the last thing he said was: 'Tell Boyden I think I know who did it and how it was done, and all I need now is to get convincing evidence. Tell him to keep track of all of them—especially Kent, and to learn if Kent's ever been to England.' How's that?"

"Fine!" exulted Seth. "Where did he git the dope?"

"Right here at headquarters," advised Corson. "Looking over our documents, consulting newspaper clippings, and talking things over. He left here threatening to make history in crime detection, although I haven't the slightest idea of what he was talking about."

"When Charlie talks that way, inspector, you can bet your bottom dollar it's somethin' big. Waal, I'll git back on the job. Thanks, inspector. Good-by."

Seth yawned and stretched.

"Guess I'm gittin' to be too old for this work," he muttered. "Up all night, and no breakfast, I would like a cup o' coffee, but fust I've gotta find out what central offices are represented by 267 and 222. Gosh durn this automatic telephone, anyway."

And once more with a rueful expression Seth rubbed the lump on his head.

CHAPTER X.

THE LIARS.

SETH BOYDEN sat at a table in the room in Kent's apartment where he had been attacked, and studied the numbers he had scrawled on an old envelope. He knew that the last four digits represented the actual telephone numbers

Kent had dialed, and therefore presented no problem. The first three digits, however, represented the first three letters of the central offices serving the respective telephone numbers, and required de-coding. In each hole on the dial, from 2 to 9 there are three letters, thus making use of all the letters of the alphabet except Q and Z. For the first call the central office was represented by the figures 222, indicating that the second hole on the dial had been operated three times. The letters appearing under this hole were "A B C," so that the first three letters of the central office called must be made up of some combination of these three letters.

The three letters permitted twenty-seven different combinations, and only one of these combinations would represent the first three letters of one of the hundred-odd central offices in Greater New York, since combinations involving the same holes in dialing must be avoided. Acquainted as he was with the names of New York central offices, Boyden quickly hit upon A C A as the combination representing the Academy central office.

To verify the fact he dialed 222 (ACA) 3465, and a voice announced "Hiltonia Hotel."

"Beg pardon," said Seth, "I called the wrong number."

He found Kent's telephone directory and looked up the hotel. Sure enough, it was listed as Academy 3465, the address being on 103rd Street.

The second telephone number presented greater difficulties. The numbers 2-6-7 represented the letters ABC, MNO and PRS, offering a possibility of many combinations. He could have worked backward by consulting the list of central office names in the directory for those beginning with A, B or C, and locating the one for which the second and third letters might be found in the sixth and seventh hole of the dial. It was nearly eight o'clock, however, and Seth preferred to save time, so he determined to learn the number by dialing it and asking questions.

He dialed it and waited for an answer.

"Hello," saluted a somewhat guarded voice.

"This is the telephone company," announced Seth. "What is your number, please?"

"Go to hell," mocked the voice, hanging up, and Seth decided that he had heard it before.

Patiently he returned to the telephone book, and in ten minutes he established the fact that 267 were the numbers used for dialing CORtlandt. Calling Information, he asked for the name and address on Cortlandt 1313 and learned that it was the business place of W. A. Forsythe on Rector Street.

"I should have known," Seth reproached himself. "That feller 'Bill' that Kent was a talkin' to wuz prob'ly W. A. Forsythe. Our lawyer friend must have gone to his office early."

Boyden brightened considerably as he consulted the telephone directory and then dialed a number.

"Foxcroft House," announced a voice.

"I want to make a reservation," announced Seth, smilingly. "I'd like a suite of two bedrooms and parlor — Be there within an hour—Name's Harry Fewsmith and daughter. O. K.? Good-by."

He grinned boyishly as he reflected that he had made the reservation in almost the same words that Kent had used when he called the Hiltonia Hotel. For a few minutes he scribbled energetically on a sheet of paper. Then he telephoned the Western Union Telegraph Company and announced that he wished to send a telegram. He read from his written memorandum to the telegraph recorder:

"Hiltonia Hotel,
"103rd Street, New York City.

"MR. HARRY FEWSMITH:

"Imperative that you leave Hiltonia at once. Go to Foxcroft House—West Eleventh Street. Reservations have been made. Leave no forwarding address. Do not telephone me or Forsythe. Beware of Fenwick. Grave danger. Boyden is dead. Will communicate later.

"(Signed) DEROY."

Seth advised the recorder to charge the telegram to Hudson 2975, listened while she read it back to him for verification, and hung up.

"Fust time I ever killed myself," he grinned, half aloud.

He obtained his hat, descended in the elevator, and found the chief's car still waiting at the curb. Jumping in, he drove downtown, stopping at a dairy lunch for breakfast. Then he continued on to Forsythe's office, where he apparently was expected.

"Here he is now," announced Quarrier, genially, as Seth entered. "We both missed our men, Mr. Boyden. Mr. Forsythe had left his place on Twenty-Seventh Street to reach his office early, as he had a date with Mr. Kent. You missed Mr. Kent for the same reason. But you don't know these gentlemen, do you? Permit me to introduce Mr. Kent and Mr. Forsythe. Gentlemen, this is Mr. Boyden, assistant to Charlie Fenwick, the phonic criminologist."

"It's a cinch that Mr. Kent didn't miss me nearly as much as I missed him," drawled Seth, cryptically, at which Kent and Quarrier exchanged significant glances. They permitted the sally to pass without comment, however. Boyden shook hands with both of them. Kent was apparently in the late twenties, as tall as Quarrier, but heavier. He was fair, smooth shaven save for a tiny mustache, and had a pleasing presence. A slight thickness of the lips, quick roving eye, and nervous, animated movement of body and limb seemed to indicate a degree of petulance, impatience and lack of restraint that might explain his inability to get on with the slow, conservative Lucius Smallman.

Forsythe was a stout little man with a prominent nose and graying hair worn pompadour. He wore a dark frock coat, striped trousers, and gray spats over his patent leather boots. A pink carnation in his buttonhole completed the sartorial picture, save for a cream-colored fedora hat which hung on the costumer behind his desk and could not possibly have belonged to any one else in the room.

"The elevator boy told you where to find me?" questioned Kent.

"Naw; I lost ye by telephone and found ye the same way, Mr. Kent."

"I see." A suspicion of a smile lurked in Kent's eyes.

"I've been asking both Mr. Kent and Mr. Forsythe about Richard Philbrick," put in Quarrier. "Mr. Kent doesn't know him at all, while Mr. Forsythe remembers him distinctly, but can think of no reason for his coming to New York."

"Indeed I can't," seconded Forsythe with an ingratiating smile, "much as I should like to be of assistance to Mr. Fenwick. That young man has the proper idea. I tell you quite frankly that if a client of mine were wanted by Fenwick I should advise him to give himself up without delay."

Boyden idolized his young superior, and he swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker. This was the manner that had won juries for W. A. Forsythe, earning for him the distinction of never having lost a murder case.

"You don't admire Charlie any more'n I do, Mr. Forsythe," returned Seth, loyally.

"True, without a doubt, Mr. Boyden. It must be a source of wonderful satisfaction to you to know that you have assisted him so substantially in his many important cases. The Willmer case, for instance, with its mysterious voices. Your work in that case was scarcely second to Fenwick's. Now, about the Smallman will. I've told Quarrier that there's a will, and that if it will assist the ends of justice I'd have no important objections to an immediate reading. I prefer, however, to discuss that matter with Mr. Fenwick in person, and I shall leave for Springfield within the hour with that idea in mind."

"And I've agreed to go with him, Mr. Boyden," announced Kent, "much as I dislike to. I suppose I have a certain family duty to perform."

Boyden nodded, understandingly.

"As for the mystery surrounding the murder," resumed Forsythe, "I—er, feel that there's no doubt about the chap now in custody in Springfield being the right man. Poor devil! I pity him."

"What do you think about the missing fifteen thousand dollars?" queried Seth.

"I'm frank to admit that the apparent theft has me stumped," confessed the little lawyer, with a despairing shake of the head. "We shall probably have to depend on Mr. Fenwick to clear that up."

"You have no theory regardin' the theft, Mr. Kent?"

"Why, er, no."

"You haven't seen the money?"

"Of course not," Kent bit off the words resentfully.

"And you haven't seen Mr. Philbrick?"

"I haven't been associated with any one by that name," answered Kent, steadily.

"I see," nodded Boyden, wearily. "Gosh, I wish Charlie Fenwick wuz here! I don't know whether to go on lettin' you fellers kid me, or to tell you what I know and make you come across with the goods. Quarrier, where's Mrs. Quarrier?"

"She's shopping, I believe."

"Alone?"

"Of course."

"Got enough money to do her shoppin', has she?"

"She's not extravagant," smiled Quarrier.

"Where do you expect to meet her?"

"Somewhere uptown."

Boyden suddenly seemed to realize that he hadn't removed his hat, and hastily took it off. His fingers strayed tenderly over the lump on his head, and the incident seemed to galvanize him into action.

"I'd like to ask you one more question, Mr. Kent," he announced. "When you were in London did you see the Tower?"

"Apropos of nothing, of course I did," answered Kent, with a tantalizing grin. "About four years ago."

Boyden nodded.

"Thank you," he acknowledged. "I hope that's true, fer of all the liars I ever ran up against, the crowd in this office has 'em all skinned! You might git away with it if I wuz as green as I look. Howsomever, I know a thing or two myself. F'rinstance, I know about a trav'lin' bag containin' fifteen thousand dollars. I know about Harry Fewsmith and daughter. I know about the Hiltonia Hotel. And I know one thing more. You fellers think you kin git in touch with Dorothy Shellworth and Richard Philbrick enny old time you like. I know you can't!"

The three men stared at each other in amazement.

"The old duffer was playing possum," exclaimed Kent angrily. "Here—let me get at that telephone."

He grabbed the instrument on Forsythe's desk and called Academy 3465.

"Hello, Hiltonia Hotel?" he shouted. "Let me talk with Mr. Harry Fewsmith, please.— What? Checked out?— How long ago? Fifteen minutes, eh?— Did they say where they were going, or leave any address?—H'hm. Very well. Thank you."

He slammed the receiver on the hook and glared at Boyden angrily. Seth moved toward the door, and with his hand on the knob, lingered for one parting shot.

"Mr. Quarrier," he drawled, "added to our other mysteries we now have the mystery of the missin' bride. You can't find her, so you'd better trot back to Springfield with Forsythe and Kent. Mr. Forsythe, you've got your customary group o' crooks fer clients, and Charlie Fenwick is after 'em. I suggest that you keep your word by advisin' 'em to come clean an' give themselves up. As fer you, Mr. Kent, you never saw Mr. Philbrick, so what's the use o' trying to find him? I've jest one more thing to say to you. I've got a lump on my head that has prob'ly affected my brain. It's affected my mind to sech an extent that I won't be happy till I see one jest like it on yours. Gentlemen, good day!"

CHAPTER XI.

A CONSULTATION.

WHEN Fenwick reached the Hudson Tube station in Newark after leaving Mrs. Cornell, he dismissed his taxi, went directly to a coin box public telephone, and called Inspector Corson at his home.

Corson was head of New York City's detective bureau and greatly admired the young telephone wire chief. He had repeatedly urged the youth to devote all his time to criminology, and observed with interest the cases Fenwick had undertaken, and had even called upon him for assistance when orthodox police methods had failed to produce results. In the Warren Willmer blackmail case the two had evolved widely dissimilar theories, and Corson had

afterward generously conceded that his pupil had given him a notable lesson. Their rivalry in that case, however, had merely strengthened the bonds of friendship between them, and neither one hesitated to call upon the other for advice or assistance when the occasion required.

"What's the matter, Charlie?" grumbled Corson good-naturedly, as he recognized his protégé's voice. "Some one steal the town hall up in Springfield? What do you mean by getting me up at six thirty?"

"Something urgent, inspector. I've got to have a talk with you, and I think you have some papers at headquarters that I must see. It's a murder case with a number of angles that will interest you. Trouble is, I'm due back in Springfield at nine o'clock, and I thought I'd risk disturbing you on the chance that your interest in the matter would outweigh the loss of sleep."

"Since you put it that way," observed the inspector, "I can't very well refuse. Where are you?"

"Tube station in Newark, about to step on a train for downtown New York. I can probably reach headquarters as soon as you can. What do you say?"

"I'll start in a few minutes," agreed the inspector. "Come on over."

He found Corson waiting when he entered the familiar office in the Centre Street building shortly after 7 o'clock. Without wasting a second, Fenwick plunged into an account of the case, beginning with the threat received by Lucius Smallman and concluding with the developments following the tragedy. Corson listened in silence until he had finished.

"Something like the Boswell Banning case in London," he observed, thoughtfully.

Fenwick brightened.

"Ah, you remember it, do you?" he exclaimed eagerly. "I'll never forget the rainy Saturday afternoon when half a dozen of us sat in this room discussing strange murder cases. At least you and your men discussed them, while I listened, and envied you fellows your experience. The talk drifted to unsolved murder cases, and Callahan, that young Irish detective of yours, ventured the opinion that there weren't three unsolved murder mysteries in London in a year."

"I remember," interrupted the inspector. "We had quite a number on the record for New York at the time, and I thought that Callahan was pointing out the relative merits of the two police systems, so I called him on it. He was quick to disclaim any such intention, and went on to say that London had fewer crimes of violence. Perhaps you'll recall that we looked up the statistics and found that one person in every twelve thousand is murdered in America every year, and that in England it is one in four hundred and twelve thousand in the same period?"

"I do recall that," assented Fenwick. "That led to a discussion of some of London's unsolved murders, and the Boswell Banning case came up. You told me that Scotland Yard had never given up the case, and that every once in a while you were queried regarding some phase of it because the murderer was thought to have fled to America. This Smallman case is so similar that I thought I'd like to look over your records in the Banning affair."

"Certainly," agreed Corson, pushing the buzzer button on his desk. A uniformed officer answered its summons.

"I want the file of papers on the Boswell Banning case. It's in the Scotland Yard file—a murder case."

The officer nodded and withdrew.

"While we are waiting," suggested the inspector, "I'd like to review what you have told me, merely to put the facts in order. Money is the dominant factor in this case. A wealthy man is shot and his safe is robbed of fifteen thousand dollars. That establishes a motive for the murder. You are holding a suspect in the person of Albert Jones. It is believed that Jones threatened Smallman. He is picked up near the house directly after the murder, a loaded revolver in his possession. It has not been discharged. Smallman had threatened to foreclose a mortgage on the Jones home. The man is in straitened circumstances, there is an infant at home, and his wife is in poor health. In other words, Jones is frantically desperate, unnerved, and has every reason for hating

Smallman. Hate, coupled with the necessity for obtaining funds supplies as complete a motive for the deed as one could wish. You have the groundwork of a strong circumstantial case against him."

"You haven't had the opportunity to study the man at close range, inspector," objected Fenwick. "You'd only have to look at him to appreciate that he isn't capable of committing a major crime. Besides, circumstantial evidence alone has never had much weight with me."

"Circumstantial evidence is frequently the best evidence," reproved Corson. "Take the old illustration, so frequently used, of the cat and the rabbit. Several people testify that they saw a cat run across the snow at a certain point. There we have the testimony of eye-witnesses—presumably unimpeachable, direct evidence. Curator Ditmars of the zoo, however, comes along and testifies that he has examined the prints in the snow and swears that they were made by a rabbit. He exhibits photographs of them, and then shows other prints made elsewhere by a cat, to point out the wide dissimilarities between the two. Which would you believe—the direct evidence of the casual eye-witness, or the circumstantial evidence of the painstaking, expert scientist?"

"I see what you mean," smiled Fenwick, "and concede the logic of it, but it doesn't change my mind about Jones. Intuition, if you will."

"Charlie," chided the inspector, "you are absolutely inconsistent and unscientific! A man who prefers intuitions to circumstance is positively dangerous. But, to resume. There is the housekeeper, Mrs. Lawson, who turns out to be the second Mrs. Smallman. It was apparently a marriage of convenience. The woman may originally have had some vestige of feeling for the man she married, but it is not in the record, and apparently it waned as she submitted to the indignity of appearing to be a domestic servant in her husband's home. She has led a drab, uneventful existence, perhaps gratefully accepting the assurance of a living and nothing more, in return for her services as a housewife. She has probably felt the pinch of poverty; certainly her sister has, burdened with the care of a crippled boy.

"There is genuine affection between the sisters, and Sarah has probably been able to assist Mrs. Cornell financially, in a small way. She longs to assist her substantially, and to gratify her own suppressed desire for a better station in life and improved standards of living. Think of the growing resentment she must have stored up as her husband's real purpose in marrying her, and real character asserted itself. How the hate in her heart must have grown and smoldered! Then there is the feminine angle of jealousy. Miss Shellworth appears in the household. Her work is comparatively light, she probably receives pay in excess of any funds at Mrs. Smallman's disposal, and is youthful, if not pretty. Certainly her position does not suffer by comparison with Mrs. Smallman's. The wife knows of the money in the safe, and has the combination. She knows that she is entitled to a third of her husband's estate in the event of his death.

"Familiar with his habits, she follows him down the stairs at midnight, first locking you and Seth in your room. She shoots him, removes part of the money from the safe, secretes it and returns to bed. She is shrewd enough to realize that the reading of the will undoubtedly will disclose the secret marriage and suggest a possible motive for the crime. Outwardly calm, capable and dispassionate, her mind is really troubled, and seeking an outlet for her emotions, she partially confides in her sister Kate. There you have that angle of it."

"I haven't overlooked it, you may be sure," advised Fenwick, "nor have I discarded it. However, she's not the missing woman in the Banning case, for I know that she's been in Springfield for the last twelve years."

"The Banning case attracts you, doesn't it?" divined the inspector. "I don't blame you, it would be interesting to tie the two up. But let's go on. Next we have DeRoy Kent. Your investigation in that direction is not complete, but the known facts indicate that Kent and his stepfather could not agree, particularly over money matters,

and Kent was driven from home. He was interested in the Shellworth girl, but Smallman succeeded in nipping that incipient romance in the bud. The boy was probably told that he might expect no part of Smallman's estate.

"Your subsequent investigation should determine the present state of his finances and the extent of his dislike to Smallman. Then you will be in a better position to say whether he would attempt such a thing as the murder, with burglary or revenge, or both as the motive. Certainly it would have been possible for Kent to leave the Shellworth girl at the railroad station, go to the Smallman home, force an entrance and pull the trick. The girl apparently had some affection for him, and even if unaware of his purpose, would probably shield him when she became acquainted with the facts. Women are like that, you know."

"In addition to getting the information you suggest regarding Kent," put in Fenwick, "I am anxious to know whether he has ever been to England. If Boyden should call after I leave here, inspector, I wish you'd ask him to follow that point up, and tell him not to lose sight of Kent. I believe our ultimate hope for success lies in that direction. There's the Philbrick angle, for instance. What do you make of that?"

"I was coming to that. Smallman's difference with Philbrick had apparently been dormant for some years. Is it possible that Kent ran across Philbrick somewhere, heard his story and decided to champion his cause? Did he undertake to restore Philbrick's fifteen thousand dollars, and when he was surprised while tampering with the safe, lose his head and pull a gun on the old man? Philbrick apparently took no active part in what occurred, since you have established that he was in Philadelphia at the time. You know, however, that Philbrick apparently left Philadephia to meet Kent. What, then, were the relations between them? Did the girl telephone Philbrick at Kent's request? Those are the important matters for you to determine, and you were correct in assigning both Boyden and Quarrier to that particular lead.

"That brings us to the girl, Dorothy Shellworth. From your description of her I feel sure that I recognized the type. Given proper environment, including association with young people of her own age, and I do not doubt but what she would be an attractive normal girl. Surrounded as she was, however, with a sordid, money-grubbing, ugly atmosphere, it seems more than probable that her natural instincts were subdued, and that she assumed the colorless, negative attitude you have stressed. An air of submission, resigned martyrdom, wasn't it? I thought so. Both Quarrier and Kent were attentive to her, and she found something to admire in each of them. In Kent's case it was an expression of the maternal instinct that led her to sympathize with him in his troubles with his stepfather, and to mother him to the extent of trying to curb his impetuosity.

"Quarrier, a steady, likable chap, however, probably appealed to her more because of a certain dependability that was not glamorous, but could be relied upon. She had ideals, presumably, and when it came down to the brass tacks of matrimony, she used her head. She, however, was indiscreet enough to keep a secret appointment with Kent. What was its object? Married to Quarrier, did Kent still exert sufficient influence over her to be able to use her for his own selfish scheme? Did he prevail upon her to obtain the combination to the safe and bring it to him? Or was there some motive for her to hate Smallman, and did she have spunk enough to shoot him and skip out of the house, returning later?

"For all we know, Kent may have been talking to Smallman from the telephone at the railroad station while Dorothy Shellworth did the actual shooting. Where did she come from; and what are her antecedents? Are you sure that the relations between Smallman and his secretary were on the level and his interest in her purely platonic? If they were not, perhaps an additional reason exists for either Miss Shellworth or Mrs. Smallman to have done the shooting."

"I hadn't thought of that at all," confessed Fenwick. "Perhaps you've hit it."

" It's only a wild sort of stab, of course, continued the inspector, as the officer returned to the room and deposited a document wallet of heavy brown paper upon his desk. " Then there's Quarrier. He admits an earlier indiscretion in a manner more to his credit than damaging. He appears to have had more genuine liking for Smallman than any of the others, and was trying to get in to warn his employer of the presence of Albert Jones, just as the shot was fired. It must have been something of a poser for him when he learned of his wife's absence from the house and her meeting with Kent. I don't mind telling you, however, that the story he gave you to account for the meeting and telephone call sounds somewhat fishy to me. As I figure the thing, his wife told him what really happened, and he realized that a plausible story would be necessary to protect her."

" You may be sure that I didn't swallow his explanation," declared Fenwick.

" Now for your handling of the case, Charlie. I think you've gone at it all wrong. If you'll pardon the criticism, I think you've tackled it from the wrong end. The first step should be to locate the missing money or to determine who took it. You should have bent every effort in that direction. Once that is successfully accomplished, you will probably be in a position to discard many factors which are totally irrelevant.

" This is undoubtedly a case where ordinary police methods would have meant success. You would merely have to round up the suspects, threaten and ' third degree ' them, assign men to the few important factors requiring explanation, and I'll wager you'd land your man—or woman. It's not too late, even now, though delay lessens the chance of ultimate success. You've enough evidence to hold Kent, Jones, Mrs. Smallman and Miss Shellworth for forty-eight hours on short affidavit forms, charging them with the theft of the money. If you haven't cleared the thing up by that time you can hold them on the murder charge for forty-eight more. Then, if you get sufficient evidence against one of them, you can have him—or her—held to await the action of the Grand Jury. That's what I would recommend."

" Perhaps you are right, inspector," agreed Fenwick, " but you must realize that I hadn't a great deal of time to spare. If I had I shouldn't have worked on the case all night and required poor old Seth to do the same thing. I considered the thing a joke when I undertook Smallman's assignment, and figured that nothing would happen. When something did happen, I was a bit unprepared. I took a long chance on landing the big fish, figuring that it was a sort of ' now or never ' problem. Then, when Mrs. Jones telephoned about three o'clock this morning to inquire about her husband, I didn't have the heart to tell her the truth. If I don't get the guilty person right away I've got to square myself with her, and gosh! how I dread it!

" Furthermore, it's nearly eight o'clock and I should really be on the job at Springfield. The central office can't be without a wire-chief, you know. Those are the reasons that prompted me to take a chance. I haven't any official standing with the Springfield police department, and if I don't complete the case right away the newspapers and local authorities may compel Chief Rogers to take it out of my hands."

The inspector nodded, understandingly.

" That would be too bad," he declared. " Except in the large American cities the police departments are woefully inefficient. Now, Charlie, I want you to understand that I'm not finding fault with what you've accomplished. I think it's wonderful! I'm merely venturing the opinion that an attack from another angle might have brought you nearer to a solution. Let's see what you've done. By using the telephone you established that Kent was in Springfield at the time of the murder, that Smallman was talking, probably to the Shellworth girl, when he was shot, that the person who was talking to him heard the shot, that a man named Philbrick is apparently implicated in the case, that Philbrick had a confederate within the house, and that Philbrick and Kent know each other. The telephone also enabled you to learn that the housekeeper was withholding significant information.

"By relying on the propensity of people to talk and your ability to recognize the material things they have said, you've been able to learn that Smallman endeavored to obtain a maximum of effort from his employees by promising to remember them in his will, that Quarrier and Miss Shellworth were married, that Smallman had married his housekeeper, and that Mrs. Smallman had the combination to the safe. I call that a remarkable series of developments as the result of a few hours' work. You pulled a master-stroke, Charlie, when you left those people alone in the house, so that they would have an opportunity to use the telephone."

"I'm pleased with that myself," admitted Fenwick. "However, I had every reason to believe it would work as it did. The United States is the world's most talkative nation. We average 160 telephone conversations per capita each year. France averages only 18 and England 16. That will give you a fair idea of the way we babble rings around foreigners. We boast, bully and confide more than any other people. I merely capitalized our American propensity to talk."

"I'll say you did. But I'm holding you up. Get on the job and review those papers."

Fenwick untied the binding string on the document wallet and removed the papers. There were copies of reports, correspondence with Scotland Yard, and newspaper clippings, all arranged chronologically. He read them over carefully, made an occasional note, and when he had finished he wore a smile of quiet satisfaction.

"I'm sure I'm on the right road, chief," he confided. "The person we want is Miss Frances Marlowe, the mystery woman in the Banning case. I see Sir Herbert Stone handled the case in London. He's head of the Yard now, isn't he?"

"Yes, and for that reason the case will some day be solved. What's your next move, Charlie?"

"I'm not sure, but if I can make proper arrangements, I think I can promise that to-night will make history in the detection of crime by telephone. I'm going down to the American Telephone Building at 195 Broadway, and then I expect to return to Springfield to resume my duties as wire chief. I think I shall leave Seth here. He's always been more than able to take care of himself. I must thank you for your assistance. I'll keep you posted."

"You'd better," cautioned Corson, "or I'll break off diplomatic relations with you. Now, just one word of warning about this fellow Forsythe, before you go. He's the shrewdest lawyer and the smoothest man I ever met. Another lawyer wouldn't undertake half the cases he fights—they're so utterly hopeless. Forsythe, however, goes right on taking them and winning them. He takes their money, of course, but I truthfully believe he does it more for love of the game. Criminal law practice, you know, gets into the blood, and in Forsythe's case I think it enables him to gratify his own unlawful tendencies in a vicarious manner. At any rate he's been a thorn in my side and anathema to the district attorney for the last ten years. Watch him, or he'll fool you!"

"Thanks again, inspector. Call on me any time you like. Good-by."

Corson again pressed the buzzer-button on his desk as Fenwick left the room. The orderly responded immediately.

"These papers may go back in the file, Kelly."

"Yes, sir. Charlie Fenwick on the warpath again, inspector?"

"He is that. Kelly, I'd give all I own to have—"

Kelly apparently was acquainted with his superior's yearnings.

"—To have a b'y like that," he interrupted.

Corson nodded silently, went to the window, and seemed to be looking out at something far away.

CHAPTER XII.

SETH SOLVES ONE MYSTERY.

IT was well that Boyden had assumed a strategic position at the door of Forsythe's office before addressing his defiant remarks to the trio. Quarrier and Kent looked toward Forsythe appealingly.

and when he nodded they moved menacingly toward the old trouble-shooter. Seth slipped into the corridor, slamming the door in their faces, and shouted "Down." A descending elevator operator heard the familiar emergency cry and halted his car.

Boyden popped in, the car descended to the main floor, and a few seconds later he was piloting the chief's automobile through the maze of traffic in Broadway. Occasionally he glanced at the mirror above him, thinking that he might be followed, and once he grew apprehensive when a taxicab, bound uptown, trailed him for half a dozen blocks. He slowed up, however, permitting it to pass, and breathed a sigh of relief when he observed that the occupants, an elderly man and woman, were complete strangers to him.

He drove to the Foxcroft house on West Eleventh Street. It was an old, eminently respectable establishment, modest and conservative in tone. Boyden and Fenwick had frequently stopped there on the occasion of their visits to New York, and had a casual acquaintance with certain members of the house staff.

"How do you do, Mr. Boyden," greeted the white-haired clerk, as Boyden approached the desk. "All alone? Same room, I suppose?"

"Not this time, Mr. Reid," he responded. "I'm just payin' a visit to some folks who should be registered here. Mr. Fewsmith and Miss Fewsmith. Have they turned up yet?"

The clerk nodded.

"What's wrong with them?" he inquired, curiously. "Girl's a nice little thing, but seems scared to death. The man seems to leave everything up to her."

"Jest a leetle family trouble," advised Boyden. "You know how those things will happen."

The clerk nodded understandingly.

"Too bad," he sympathized. "They're in room 202. I'll send a boy up with you."

"Never mind, please," declined Seth. "I'm not too old to climb one flight o' stairs, and I'd like to surprise 'em."

He went upstairs, found the room, and knocked on the door. There was a hurried hum of conversation within, the sound of footsteps, and then the door was partially opened, slowly and cautiously. Dorothy peered out.

"Mr. Boyden!" she cried. "Father, it's Mr. Boyden—alive!"

The hands that had grasped the door so cautiously as if to prevent ingress, dropped to her sides, and she swayed from the shock. Boyden pushed into the room and steadied her.

"It's all right, my dear," he assured her. "I'm a purty tough bird, and I'm far f'm bein' a dead one yit."

He led her to a rocker, and she dropped into it, half laughing, half crying. Pouring a drink from a pitcher of ice water, he held it to her trembling lips, and she endeavored to control herself as she sipped it.

"Remarkable!" murmured a voice across the room, and Seth regarded with interest the speaker. He was an owl-faced man of about fifty; with bald head, gray mustache, and shaggy eyebrows. His rimless glasses were on a black ribbon, and these he now adjusted to study Seth with an air of detached curiosity.

"Remarkable!" he repeated. "We thought you were dead, you know. Concussion of the brain, perhaps—or a fractured skull. Yet here you are."

"Yep, here I am," repeated Boyden, "alive and well."

"I'm so glad," murmured the girl, faintly. "Mr. Boyden was awfully nice to me, father, on the ride down from Springfield. I felt just like telling him everything and asking his advice."

"I wish you had," regretted Seth. "'Twould have saved each of us somethin' of a shock. Well, folks, I've come fer the money. Where's the bag?"

The girl's eyes widened, her mouth opened, and then she threw up the back of her hand as if to suppress her own inclination to scream.

"No, no!" she protested. "You mustn't touch it! It belongs to father, and it means so much to him. You don't know what I've endured to be able to return it to him!"

Seth directed a kindly smile toward her. "Mebbe I do, Miss Dorothy," he drawled. "But 'twasn't the right way to git it."

"Any way was the right way," exclaimed the girl, fiercely. "There wasn't any legal way. The courts are not for the poor and the unfortunate; they're just machinery for the powerful and the wealthy."

Once more her animation lent her charm, and Seth found the transformation remarkable.

"Won't you sit down?" suggested Richard Philbrick. "This affair appears to need talking over."

"So it does," agreed Boyden, dropping into a chair, "but after we git through talkin' I'm gonna take that bagful o' money away with me."

"That remains to be seen, sir," asserted Philbrick, with dignity. "It is necessary for me to go back a bit. Five years ago, sir, I was the head of a prosperous, reputable business. You know the nature of it, I presume?"

"I've heard you were a printer," advised Boyden.

"Nothing of the kind," disagreed Philbrick. "I was an inventor. Printing was merely incidental to the business I had built up. Years ago I invented an autographic register. You have seen the device—a manifolding affair for writing sales checks, railroad tickets, bills of lading, and many other things of like character. My machine gave perfect registration, alignment and legibility for as many as nine copies. No muss, no smear, no mechanical, carbon or feed troubles. It revolutionized the register industry. I started to manufacture and found a ready market for my product. Then I branched out into the printing business to protect my machine. Perfect printing and spooling were necessary to insure a proper job, and the ordinary printer didn't always turn out a job with those qualities. I wanted my customers to get perfect service. Within a short time every lessee of my registers was purchasing his stationery from me. The printing branch of my business became the most important and the most lucrative."

"Father," suggested the girl, "perhaps I could tell Mr. Boyden the important facts much more briefly."

It was evident that Philbrick was a garrulous individual and relished an audience. A deprecating wave of the hand brushed aside the objection.

"Hush, child," he cautioned. "Mr. Boyden will understand much better when he has heard my story. I repeat, sir, that the printing branch of my business became the important one. From a single floor in a loft building my business expanded until a group of three buildings was necessary to house my plant. And I had only scratched the surface. My sales force was small, I had done practically no advertising, and orders were booked far ahead.

"Then came the paper shortage of 1919. It caught me unawares. I had financed everything out of operating income, and had failed to build up a line of credit. Money was tight, the banks didn't know me, and disaster seemed to be staring me in the face.

"Finally a business associate suggested that I get in touch with Lucius S. Smallman. I didn't know Smallman at the time—had never even heard of him. An appointment was made, and I permitted him to go over my books so that he might realize the exact status of my business. Then I asked for a fifty-thousand dollar loan and intimated that I would be willing to pay a slightly higher rate of interest than the prevailing one. He took my breath away by suggesting a loan of twenty-thousand for which he would require my note for thirty-five thousand, and pointed out certain ways in which I might stretch the loan to tide me over my difficulties.

"Imagine it, sir! Fifteen thousand dollars bonus for a loan of twenty thousand! No wonder they called him 'Loan Shark' Smallman! I was desperate and had exhausted every effort to obtain funds. It was barely possible that the twenty thousand, plus whatever I might realize by collections from delinquent customers, would pull me through; I accepted his terms, but before we completed the transaction he insisted that I incorporate my business in the State of New Jersey. I afterward learned that he did this to avoid any chance of a charge of usury, which a corporation cannot plead."

"Come, come, father," protested the girl. "Mr. Boyden hasn't time to listen to all this. Let me tell him."

Philbrick frowned and shrugged his shoulders, resignedly.

" Very well," he assented.

" Father was forced into bankruptcy and lost everything," explained the daughter, rapidly. " Mr. Smallman got hold of the business, straightened it out, and sold it. He made thousands of dollars. There was all sorts of litigation, but the lawyers couldn't do a thing for us.

" From the time I returned from a vacation in England, after completing my finishing school education, I had been a sort of secretary to father. I had studied stenography and typewriting for that purpose. Confronted with the necessity for earning my own living, I wondered if it would not be possible for me to kill two birds with one stone. If I could obtain employment with Lucius Smallman it might be possible for me to work out some method of compelling him to return the money he had stolen. He didn't know of my existence, so it was a comparatively simple matter.

" Father wrote me a letter of recommendation in which he stated that I had been a clerk in his office, had given satisfactory service, and was acquainted with the clerical details of the autographic register and printing business. This was made out in the name of Shellworth, my mother's family name. I went to Springfield and applied to Mr. Smallman for employment. I told him that I had thought my services might be of value to him in straightening out the affairs of the register company, and he was quick to see the point. He never suspected my relationship to Richard Philbrick, and we came to terms. I tried my best to make myself indispensable, and can truthfully say that I earned every penny of the salary he paid me.

" Once he had disposed of father's business, he used me for everything. It was a nasty, disagreeable business, his Utopian Prudent Loan Company, and I found it extremely distasteful. It gave me a living, however, and I was always buoyed up by the thought that some day I might find a way to help father. We had talked the matter over and had decided that although Smallman had grabbed everything, the extent to which he had willfully defrauded father was the difference between twenty thousand dollars and thirty-five thousand—in other words, the bonus of fifteen thousand he had exacted.

" Well, father left our home in Pittsburgh and obtained employment as foreman in a Philadelphia printing plant. Smallman continued to prosper and began to indulge himself a bit by purchasing a car and engaging a chauffeur. I was frequently discouraged and impatient, but Mr. Kent and Mr. Quarrier were kind to me, and I stuck it out. I might say that DeRoy was so chronically at odds with Mr. Smallman that he won my sympathy, and I confided in him to the extent of making known my identity and purpose. He not only encouraged me, but generously offered to help me if I desired it. That's really all there is to it, except that I finally accomplished what I set out to do, and here you are, inviting me to turn success into failure."

" Not exactly, Miss Dorothy," disagreed Seth. " Funny thing, but I fust knew you as Miss Dorothy, and I can't quite remember to call you Mrs. Quarrier. Mebbe I'm aimin' to keep you out of trouble. But you broke off your story jest at the int'restin' part. S'pose you tell me how you got the money?"

" Very well," assented the girl. " I knew that Mrs. Lawson had the combination to the safe, and at every opportunity when she left the house I made a search for it. Months ago I found where it was, but I didn't even make a copy of it. Then, a few days ago, I learned from letters I wrote for Mr. Smallman that he intended drawing a large sum from the bank and carrying it in the safe over night. Since no other means of compelling restitution of father's money had ever presented, I decided to appropriate the amount from the safe.

" I called DeRoy on the telephone and he agreed that it was the only way. He promised to come to Springfield, get the money, and hold it at his apartment until father called for it. Yesterday afternoon, half an hour after Mr. Smallman put the money in the safe, I consulted the combination in Mrs. Lawson's bureau drawer, opened the safe and took fifteen thousand. I put the money in a Boston bag in my room, and

stole out the back door with it while you three men were in the living room downstairs. On my way to the station to meet DeRoy, I saw Albert Jones going toward the house, and I grew alarmed. DeRoy wasn't due until very late, so I walked about town, fearfully frightened, until his train came in. I told him about Jones right away.

"Much as he disliked Mr. Smallman, DeRoy didn't want to see him injured, so he suggested that I telephone Mr. Smallman and warn him, while he went back to the house to look around. It's only a short walk to the station—about five minutes. I had trouble in getting Mr. Smallman on the phone, and when I did, the next thing I heard was the shot. I was panic-stricken. Pretty soon DeRoy came back and said that something had apparently happened, because the lights were lit and when he got there Quarrier was kicking and banging on the front door and ringing the bell. He considered discretion the better part of valor and came back to me. I told him about the shot, and we agreed that it would be best for him to get back to New York at once. He took the money and left on the last train. I tried to steal into the house unobserved, but Mr. Fenwick caught me."

"How much of this does Mr. Quarrier know?" inquired Seth.

"All of it, now, but he didn't know a thing about my plans in advance. He didn't even know I was Dorothy Philbrick. When Mr. Fenwick left the house with Chief Rogers last night, Mr. Quarrier came up to see me and demanded the whole story. He grew quite melodramatic, and thought I had been untrue to him, so I told him everything. He told me how foolish I'd been and reproached me for not having taken him into my confidence.

"Then he pointed out that it would be decidedly inadvisable to let Mr. Fenwick know what had happened, because Mr. Kent had been at or near the house when the shooting occurred, and would be suspected of having had a hand in it. That's why he invented that story which he told Mr. Fenwick on the ride to Newark, early this morning."

"And you don't know a thing about the shooting?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Boyden; I swear it."

"You spoke of a vacation abroad, a little while ago. Where was it spent?"

"England, Scotland and Ireland, and a few days in France."

Boyden nodded, and changed the subject.

"You double-crossed me nicely this mornin', didn't you, miss?"

"We simply had to warn DeRoy, so father wouldn't get mixed up in it. We took a cab and reached the apartment ahead of you. Father had just gotten in from Philadelphia, and we had scarcely had a chance to say hello to each other when you came along. We didn't know what DeRoy was going to do, and I was scared to death when he knocked you out. He made Mr. Quarrier help him tie you up. He thinks the blow killed you. Did you know that?"

"No," smiled Boyden.

"Well, he does. How did you know where to find us?"

"By telephone. You wouldn't understand, I'm afraid. Now, there's only one thing for you and your father to do, and that is to keep out of this mess. Stay right here at this hotel, don't write or telephone to any one for a few days, and give Charlie Fenwick a chance to find out who did the shootin'. As fer the money, I'll take it back to Springfield with me, and mebbe, after everything else is straightened out, we kin think o' some way fer your dad to get his fifteen thousand back. That'll be best fer all hands. You see, now, don't you, how a thing o' that kind kin git you into a peck o' trouble?"

She nodded, sadly.

"If only Mr. Smallman hadn't been shot!" she sighed.

"'Twouldn't have made no difference," Seth assured her. "The money would have been found jest the same. Now about your marriage to Quarrier. You knew that your daughter was married, Mr. Philbrick?"

"Yes. A very fine young man he seems, too."

"None better, I guess," declared Boyden. "By the way, Dorothy, what's his given name? Seems to me I've never heard it, and I'd like to call him by it."

"You'd better not," she warned him, with a smile. "It's Alpheus, and he hates it."

"Waal, I kin call him Al, then. How'd you ever come to marry him, I wonder, with all this big undertakin' on your mind?"

She shrugged her shoulders and blushed.

"I liked him—he was so gentle, so kind-hearted, so nice to me. And he was so persistent, too. Mr. Smallman knew he liked me, and used to tease me about him. He was always asking Mr. Quarrier if I had accepted him yet."

"Haven't got used to the idee, yit, have ye?" grinned Seth. "Callin' your husband 'Mr. Quarrier.' I'm s'prised at ye. Waal, let's have the money."

She reluctantly brought out the bag and Seth counted the money.

"Right," he announced. "Got plenty to see you through fer a few days?"

"Plenty," she advised him.

"All right, then. I'm off fer Springfield. You stay here until you hear from me. Good-by, folks."

They shook hands, and when Seth left, father and daughter were standing at the door, both smiling with apparent relief.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

ʊ ʊ ʊ ʊ

THE SONG OF THE SATISFIED CHRISTMASER

TO just be me
On Christmas Day!
What fate could be
More proud and gay?

I'd like to be
The shining tree!
But then I could not stand and see
Its candle-lighted tinselcy!
I'd like to be the candles, still
I'd burn out then, as candles will.

I'd like to be the mistletoe! It
Would not be possible (Although it
Would be exciting quite, I know it!)
To also stand with you, below it!

And I submit it would be jolly
To be the red and twinkling holly.

The props have fun at Christmas! Why,
They've just as much as you and I!
They make a great occasion of it,
The candles, tree and wreaths—they love it!

But after all, to just be me,
And eat and laugh and feel and see!
What fate could be more proud and gay
On this auspicious Christmas Day!

Mary Carolyn Davies.

The Bird of Dawning

By OLIVE McCLINTIC JOHNSON

PATTY KATE sat looking across at the big house which was so near and yet so terribly far off. Shut away from the world by the trees which towered above the gables, it achieved an added aloofness by the brick wall—a wall surmounted by spikes—that separated it from the Philistine Orphanage.

Patty Kate, with her elbows on her knees and her lean cheeks resting on her fists, scowled at those spikes, They seemed to represent a barrier between her and all the lovely things she wanted in life and probably never would have.

Suddenly she raised her head and her hunched shoulders straightened. The fine eyes lighted and the thin little face, that would be beautiful some day when Patty Kate outgrew her freckles, all but burst into smiles. A scarlet tanager, belated on his southward passage, had chosen the moment to alight on one of the spikes. Patty Kate checked her impulse to clap her hands. A second thought brought them together in a gesture of suppliance. The lips parted and she closed her eyes. Seeing a redbird always gave one a blessed privilege.

"I wisht," she began fervently—"I wisht my hair would curl and more meat would grow on my bones." Then with the passion of a Parsee devotee she concluded: "So's I'd get 'dopted."

The tanager nodded his tufted head as if assuring her of absolute fulfillment, flapped his bright wings, and was off like a dart of flame. The fires in Patty Kate's eyes smoldered again. It probably would not come true. She always made the same wish, and she only grew thinner.

"Visitors don't never 'dopt the skinny ones," she reflected mournfully. "They

always pick the plump, curly ones." Patty Kate heaved a sigh down the length of her.

"Patty Kate! Patty Ka-ate!" called a voice from within the stern gray walls. "Look after the younger children. Keep them away from the wall."

"Yes'm, Mrs. Bales."

Reluctantly Patty Kate rose to watch the younger children at their afternoon airing. None of them seemed in imminent danger of crossing the deadline, which was an imaginary mark running from the corner of the stark gray building to the wall with spikes, so Patty Kate performed a perennial task.

"Come here, Freddy Kane, and blow your nose," said she, mechanically suiting the action to the word. "And you, Sadie Mitchell, look at your stockings!" These ministrations completed, Patty Kate resumed her thoughts, sitting there on the gray steps.

She'd probably spend her remaining days attending Freddy Kane's nose and keeping Sadie Mitchell's stockings moored. She had a contempt for children without pride enough to wipe their own noses. Patty Kate helped with the buttons, too—the endless task of keeping the orphans' buttons sewed on. Next year they'd probably teach her to darn. Darn!

Of course she did the menial tasks without complaining, though she hated them badly enough. But they couldn't down her—nothing could—any more than a princess could be debased by temporary disguise. Patty Kate knew. All she needed was a chance. If she only had a chance she could learn to play the piano and sing and dance like the children she had once seen at a circus. That circus. It was the one bright memory of her past—her background, so to speak. Often when Freddy Kane or Sadie Mitchell objected to her ministrations she could bring them back to tractability by the mere threat: "Then I won't tell you about the circus."

Patty Kate was the only one of the orphans who had ever seen a circus, and it gave her a certain distinction. Oh, she was easily the outstanding figure among the Philistines. But Patty Kate didn't want to be an outstanding figure—not in an orphanage. What she wanted was a chance.

But chances were few and far between. She sighed again. She guessed she'd have to make her chance. Look at Joan of Arc and William Tell and *Cinderella*. They'd all have been pretty badly sunk if they hadn't taken a chance. Yes, she'd take the first chance that offered itself.

There was another thing besides her circus experience which Patty Kate had to be proud of. It was her locket. None of the children in the home had ever seen such a locket, much less possessed one. She drew it from within her blouse. It was of a design made popular by England's ponderous queen in the latter part of the preceding century. It was of the size of a walnut and hung from a heavy flat chain. By pressing a knob it flew open, and then—hold your breath—you saw Patty Kate's parents: the young man with the mild eyes and sloping shoulders and the attractive woman beside him.

Patty Kate replaced the locket and shifted her position uneasily. Again her eyes fell on the turrets of the mansion beyond the wall. She knew something of the history of the owner. An old lady lived there in solitary grandeur. Tradition said that she had once lost a grandchild. Patty Kate's heart went out to the lone old grandam whose sorrow was great enough to immolate her from the world. Why, the children of the orphanage were not even allowed to play on the side next the wall, for fear they'd remind the poor old lady of her grief, Patty Kate supposed. At that, it seemed rather a waste—so much love there for one lost child, and so many lost children here needing love. Patty Kate wrinkled her nose. She was only ten, but she knew she could have fixed it somehow. If she were a princess with a wand—

"It's outrageous!" came a voice from within the orphanage. It was the voice of the new teacher whom Patty Kate loved. "The old curmudgeon! You'd think she'd be ashamed to write a letter like this."

"We've had some gingery ones," returned Mrs. Bales with a sigh. "Full of crank-sided instructions like never allow-

ing the children to sing or dance or see a circus. Sometimes I almost doubt the wisdom of going on. Then I say it's bound to work out right eventually."

"But this—this. It's sacrilege!" stormed Miss Henderson.

That was a hard word for Patty Kate—and she wasn't much interested anyhow. Not nearly as much as in a sudden threatened invasion of her charges.

"Here you!" she shrilled, jumping up and running to head off the onslaught. "Keep away from that wall. Don't you know no better?"

"Aw, Patty Cake, we want to see the big house," pouted Freddy Kane.

"But you mustn't. It's—it's—" Patty Kate thought swiftly. "It's an ogre's castle," she finished darkly. "Come on away—and I'll tell you 'bout the circus."

Meanwhile the conversation within the house went on unimpeded. The new teacher was holding the letter which had precipitated the discussion. She looked at it ruefully and reread it.

> DEAR MADAM:
>
> Inclosed herewith you will find a Christmas check sent by Mrs. Patricia Parkinson to the Philistine Orphanage. Mrs. Parkinson desires that the inmates of the institution have as enjoyable a time as possible with the proceeds of this check, with the proviso, viz., that your Christmas celebration shall not be of a religious nature, or reflect in any way what is commonly called 'the Christmas spirit.' Mrs. Parkinson suggests excerpts from the classics as a possible entertainment.
>
> Yours very truly,
> HARRIET JONES,
> Secretary to Mrs. Parkinson.

"Excerpts from the classics!" broke out the new teacher. "For Christmas! What on earth would be suitable?"

"That is for you to decide," returned Mrs. Bales patiently. "I'm putting it entirely in your hands."

"It's very unusual," said Miss Henderson, shaking her head uncertainly. "Like 'Hamlet' without *Hamlet*."

"Of course it's unusual, but it's an order and must be obeyed," affirmed Mrs. Bales. "It's a rather peculiar situation," she went on. "Mrs. Parkinson founded and supports the home."

The new teacher looked up interestedly. "I didn't know that."

"She's a very lonely old lady," continued Mrs. Bales. "I think I'll tell you a little of her history. Years ago her only daughter, beautiful Kate Parkinson, instead of following the traditions of the family, went in for a career—college settlements or something. That, of course, was a great humiliation to proud Mrs. Parkinson; but she nearly died when Kate married some anæmic uplifter interested in the same sort of slum work. The old lady cut her off without even the traditional shilling. And later, when Kate died after Patty Kate was born—"

"Patty Kate? Ours?" gasped the new teacher.

"Exactly," returned Mrs. Bales, glancing out of the window to see if the child was near. Finding the coast clear, she went on: "She's the excuse for the orphanage. Mrs. Parkinson wouldn't accept her as her granddaughter, neither could she see her granddaughter suffer; so she founded this institution for the child. Built it on a corner of her estate and then separated it by a Chinese wall," she added bitterly. "It's a diabolical gesture, a caricature of mercy. Look at the name she gave it—Philistine Orphanage. Every human impulse seems to have dried up within her. She finds a sardonic amusement in burlesquing benevolence." She paused to smile at the new teacher's incredulity.

"You see, it's the reason Patty Kate has never been adopted," presently added Mrs. Bales. "She couldn't be. She, in a way, is the institution. I don't know Mrs. Parkinson's plans, of course, but the supposition is Patty Kate will be kept here endlessly. In time she'll probably be placed in charge."

"And she doesn't know?" The new teacher's eyes were dark with pity.

Mrs. Bales shook her head. "Not a thing. It's part of the understanding. Patty Kate must never know."

And here Fate, as if impatient of the slow moving clumsiness of mortals, stepped in and took a hand. She allowed Patty Kate to successfully quell her charges and led the child back to her seat on the steps.

Patty Kate arrived just in time to hear Mrs. Bales's concluding words: "*Patty Kate must never know.*"

The effect was electric. She keened her sharp little features upward like a pointer pup nosing a new and particularly intriguing scent of game.

"What became of her father?" she heard the new teacher ask.

A look of intense interest overspread Patty Kate's features, and she edged nearer the window. It was a question of which she most awfully wanted to know the answer.

"Oh, he did the best he could, I suppose, which wasn't much," returned Mrs. Bales dispiritedly. "He kept the child, but he played a losing game with the world, and finally gave up. The last thing he did was queer. He had got down to bed rock, but he scraped enough together to take Patty Kate to a circus."

"Circus?"

"Yes. It's her proudest memory."

Patty Kate smiled and nodded, then she poised again to hear Mrs. Bales's concluding words:

"But he deserted her at the circus. Disappeared. The next morning some ice harvesters fished his frozen body out of the Hudson."

"Oh-h-h!"

A sudden stifled exclamation broke from the lips of Patty Kate. She sank to the ground and the nails of her slim little fingers cut into the flesh. Her father had done this awful thing, and she had not known. Engrossed with the revelation, the remainder of the conversation was lost to her.

"It was just around the bend in the river there," said Mrs. Bales. "He was queer to the last, choosing that particular spot. Of course Mrs. Parkinson's was the first place they brought the body."

"What was his name?"

"Baker."

"And her name's really Patty Kate? I thought it was a nickname. Half the children call her Patty Cake, you know."

"Yes; it does sound rather fantastic—Patty Kate Baker. Poor youngster.

But the poor youngster was now sitting up and fiercely brushing the tears from her eyes. They were largely tears of mortification. The thought which registered strongest with Patty Kate was that nobody must know of the ignominious end of her father. Here she had boasted to every child in the institution of her glamorous circus experience, and it had ended like that. Her father had left her to go and jump in the river. They had fished him out like a cake of ice. Shocking! If the other children found it out, gone forever would be the glory of that tale. She'd have nothing to fall back on but her locket, and Patty Kate doubted if the locket would be sufficient to hold them.

But the incident was soon forgotten, submerged by the swirl of succeeding events. Quite soon after this Miss Henderson began the rehearsals for the Christmas celebration, and, gorgeous gloriousness, Patty Kate was cast for a stellar rôle.

In the presence of her charges Miss Henderson appeared the calm director, but her communing with Mrs. Bales was little short of tragic.

"I've had a wretched time selecting a piece," she confessed; "and even after we got it underway we found a tabooed passage." Then she went on, shaking her head wearily: "There doesn't seem to be any literature entirely devoid of the Christmas spirit except the multiplication table or a recipe for oatmeal gruel."

"What did you select?" asked Mrs. Bales.

"The ghost scenes from 'Hamlet.'"

Mrs. Bales held up her hands.

"It's warlike and spectacular, and the children like it," defended Miss Henderson. "But what am I to do with this passage?" And she quoted:

> "Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
> Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,
> The bird of dawning singeth all night long—
> So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

Mrs. Bales smiled gently at the new teacher's perplexed face.

"Leave it in," she returned quietly.

Patty Kate loved play-acting, and soon she knew all the parts. Her favorite pastime was to recite the lines, imagining

herself by turns the warlike soldiers, the ghost, *Horatio,* and *Hamlet.*

Came the night before Christmas and the final rehearsal of the bizarre performances. Patty Kate was in a fever of excitement. It was a dress rehearsal with spears and everything. Introduced for the first time to the beautiful world of make-believe, she was like Alice in Wonderland. When some small urchin faltered in his lines involuntarily she would prompt him from memory. She seemed eager to carry the whole burden of the performance upon her small shoulders.

"*My hour is almost come,*" recited the unghostly ghost performer.

"*Alas, poor ghost,*" responded Patty Kate in heart-rending tones.

"*Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing to what I shall unfold,*" rattled off the ghost.

"*Speak; I am bound to hear!*" urged Patty Kate with emotion that Sothern himself might have envied.

Here Patty Kate's incomparable playing reacted so startlingly upon the ghost as to leave that tyro suddenly bereft of her lines. There was a moment's awkward pause. Then Patty Kate, with a swift transition, took upon herself the rôle of ghost and answered her own impassioned query:

"I am thy father's spirit,
Doomed for a certain time to walk the night,
And for the day confin'd to fast in fires
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burned and purg'd away."

Mrs. Bales, who was looking on, rocked with laughter. She edged near Miss Henderson and whispered: "You'd have a better performance if you let Patty Kate take all the parts, wouldn't you?"

"Infinitely better," returned Miss Henderson, signaling for the curtain.

To the other children it was more or less a routine matter, and they piled into bed and fell asleep much as usual. but Patty Kate could not sleep. The dramatic action, the witchery of the lines, the unusual costuming had taken possession of her imagination.

Christmas was wonderful. How thankful she was for it, and for all the lovely spears and torches and clanky costumes. It was precious of that dear old lady beyond the wall to provide so much magnificence for the orphans— Mrs. Bales had told them about Mrs. Parkinson's Christmas check. From where she lay in bed Patty Kate could see a light in the house next door. That poor, patient, lonely old grandmother was still grieving for her lost one. Patty Kate felt as if she ought to do something about it. At least Mrs. Parkinson should have some personal tribute for her kindly deed, not a mere letter of thanks.

Suddenly she sat up in bed, gripped by a gorgeous thought. Why not invite the old lady to the celebration? Of course. It was an amazing solution. Patty Kate glowed with the idea. Mrs. Parkinson should come and see the joy she had provided, and at the same time furnish a notable audience. Oh, bullylujah! Patty Kate had to admit it was rather flat playing *Hamlet* with only the orphans for an audience.

Patty Kate was out of bed in a twinkling. A moment later she had her clothes on and was descending the stairs, shoes in hand. She was going to extend a personal invitation to the dear old lady.

Between Patty Kate and her goal was the wall with spikes, but Patty Kate was wiry. Besides, there was a certain limb of a certain tree by which she had always felt she could negotiate the wall, and she did. Rather breathlessly she plumped down into the grounds of Mrs. Parkinson. She looked back at the wall uncertainly. There was no aiding tree on this side, and Patty Kate wondered how she would ever get back to the orphans. But no matter; the important thing was seeing Mrs. Parkinson. She faced about. The lower part of the house was dark, but the light still burned in the upper room.

Patty Kate made a swift reconnaissance of the grounds. No, she'd not disturb the servants by ringing the bell. Besides, this was a purely private matter between her and the adorable old lady. She'd go up and see her in her room. There was a wistaria vine clambering over the pergola just beneath the lighted window. It seemed to have grown there especially for Patty Kate's purpose. She caught it dexterously and was on her way. She reached the top

of the porch, then the window, raised it, and stepped over the sill.

Across the room, in a great armchair before the dim light, sat a hunched figure, which turned quickly to stare her out of countenance. It was an alarming figure: a tall, skinny old lady—why, she had no more flesh on her bones than Patty Kate!—with a beak of a nose, black, piercing eyes, and a chin that said, "Do as I say, and do it quickly!" It seemed to Patty Kate as if her foolish words about the "ogre" had suddenly comé true.

It would be difficult to tell which was more surprised, Patty Kate or Mrs. Parkinson; but Patty Kate, being younger, regained her composure first.

"You're tired," she said, resolutely approaching the forbidding old lady. "I feel a little like that, too—play-acting's awful tiring."

"Who in the world are you?" demanded the stern figure, sitting very erect.

For a moment Patty Kate was somewhat taken aback. Then there popped into mind a familiar line which seemed to be suitable.

"*A friend to this ground and liegeman to the Dane,*" she parroted without conscious thinking.

Now it was the old lady's turn for surprise. "What-t?" she gasped, leaning forward in her chair.

"I forgot," faltered Patty Kate. "That's part of our Christmas play. Of course you wouldn't know."

Mrs. Parkinson shook her head and mumbled: "'Hamlet' as a Christmas play!" Then she stiffened with a new thought and the black eyes seemed to burn clear through Patty Kate. "Of course you can have come from but one place, you little Philistine! Such inso—"

She rose to reach for the bell, but Patty Kate forestalled her.

"Oh, it wasn't any trouble at all," said she reassuringly. "That is, except the climbing, and I don't mind."

"Who sent you?" demanded the old lady, her hand poised over the bell.

Patty Kate gave her an ingratiating smile. "I'll have to ask you not to say anything about it, but I came without being sent. And another thing, could you lend me a ladder to get back with? The wall's pretty hard to climb."

"You climbed the wall?" repeated Mrs. Parkinson, the threatening hand dropping ineffectually to her side.

"Oh, it wasn't anything," deprecated Patty Kate. "You see, I was so anxious to see you that made it easy. Nothing's hard if you want to do it bad enough," she finished judiciously.

Mrs. Parkinson sat down suddenly. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"You. I—I wanted to see you."

"Well, I'm not much to look at!" And the stern face relaxed into a sardonic smile.

"No'm," agreed Patty Kate. "But you're good," she hastened to add. "You've made all the orphans so happy, planning such a nice Christmas for them with swords and helmets and tin union suits—"

Here the old lady made curious gurgling sounds in her throat, which Patty Kate did not take the time to interpret, she was so intent upon her theme.

"And that's why I came. We want you to be as happy as we are, and I thought if you'd come to our celebration mebbe you'd forget about your own little grandchild you loved so much and—"

"My aunt in heaven!" gasped Mrs. Parkinson.

"Was it your aunt?" asked Patty Kate innocently. "I thought it was a child like me."

Again the old lady reacted curiously. She clapped her hands to her head and nodded from side to side. "Oh—oh!" said she. "I'm losing my mind."

Patty Kate laid gently restraining hands upon her. "No'm, no'm, you ain't," said she soothingly. "You just feel bad to be reminded of your trouble. But don't think about it; that's the best way with things you can't help. Sometimes I don't think about being skinny for weeks at a time. And don't you either."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the old lady. Then she began making the curious sounds in her throat again. "Lord, that's funny. Child, how would you like to stay around here and keep me in a good humor?"

"Well, I can't stay very long, 'cause it's

late now, but I'll amuse you all I can. Want to see my locket?" she began. It was her tried and true way of amusing people. She drew the locket from her blouse, but the reaction of the old lady was as unexpected as it was disconcerting. One glance and she flung out her clawlike hand wildly and pushed the locket from her.

"Take it away!" she cried. Then she fixed Patty Kate with a terrible glance. "Who sent you here?" she demanded suspiciously.

Patty Kate answered the queer old lady with patience. "I came myself, I told you." Again she edged near and proffered her treasure. "You didn't see the inside. The inside's nicest of all."

This time the curious old dame covered her face with her hands and shuddered. "No, no—I won't."

There was nothing left for Patty Kate to do but return the locket to her blouse. "Then I'll tell you 'bout the circus," said she resignedly. She seated herself on the arm of the old lady's chair and began: "A little girl in a starchy dress sat on a horse's back. She didn't hold on at all, she just threw kisses. My father told me to stand up and hold out my hands and mebby I could catch one."

"What a shiftless thing your father was!" broke bitterly from the old lady.

Patty Kate stood up suddenly. "He was not!" she flung back hotly. Tardily she remembered her manners. "Excuse me. He was—" Then she recalled the hideous truth and her tongue faltered.

Mrs. Parkinson noted the hesitation and taunted her cruelly. "Yes, tell me what he was if you dare. Inconsequential—"

Patty Kate flung up her head defiantly. "He was a"—she thought swiftly—"a Arctic explorer," she finished with a fine regard for the truth as well as her own sensitive feelings.

There was an appreciative twinkle in Mrs. Parkinson's eyes and she broke into cackles of merriment. "Exactly." The old dame nodded and chuckled approvingly. "Thank Heaven you are not a bit like your father," she was thinking, but she did not put the thought into words. Instead, she suddenly asked: "And who was your mother?"

"She was my father's wife," returned Patty Kate quietly, as if the simple explanation disposed of the whole matter.

"Too true!" The old lady's sigh was so deep and genuine that Patty Kate's warm little heart was touched.

"You're thinking about your own little grandchild that was lost, aren't you?" she suggested, edging near again and patting the thin old hands on which the veins stood out like blue cords.

The old lady looked at her sharply, but she could read only innocent concern in the child's face. "Yes, I am," she admitted.

Suddenly there came into Patty Kate's head another of those quick inspirations for which she was noted. Here was her chance! Here was an opening such as Cinderella or Joan of Arc certainly would have turned into a golden opportunity. She'd try.

"See here," said Patty Kate, taking the bull by the horns and launching immediately into her theme. "You'll never find your child. You've tried every way you can and you can't."

"How do you know I've tried to find her?" interrupted the old lady crisply.

"Well, that's what you'd do, wouldn't you? Anybody would. Of course. And 'specially you, Mrs. Parkinson, because you're so good to orphans. You have a beautiful heart."

"*Angels and ministers of grace defend us!*" involuntarily broke from the thin old lips. In a twinkling there flashed across the proud old irreconcilable's mind a panorama of her past—a decade of diabolism. She had thought her way best. To meet the situation with a sneer and treat it with derision had been her cynical program. She recalled the sardonic glee with which she had devised fetters for those she was pleased to call her Philistines, ending in this master stroke, this caricature of Christmas. And she had failed. Here was one of her victims—the arch victim, undoubtedly—praising her for kindness to orphans, and imputing to her beauties of the heart which were as foreign to her as to a stone Buddha.

"Oh, you know it, too, don't you? 'Hamlet'?"

"Some of it," came in changed tones from the badly shaken old woman.

"And do you know the bird of dawning part?" she eagerly wanted to know. "It's the loveliest of all." Without waiting for an invitation Patty Kate stepped out in front of Mrs. Parkinson, lifted her joyful little face and launched into the exquisite lines:

"Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long—
So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

It was a heart-robbing performance. The sparkling eyes, the transported face and the sweet, innocent voice would have battered down ramparts more impregnable than the proud old grandam's stony heart.

"The bird of dawning," repeated Patty Kate rapturously. "Why, it's to-night—the bird of dawning singeth to-night, Mrs. Parkinson," said she, taking her grandmother's hand.

"Yes," returned the old lady weakly, "I think I hear it now."

"Where? Oh, where?" asked Patty Kate, running to the window to listen.

"Here in my heart," whispered Mrs. Parkinson with lowered head, and a close observer might have detected a suspicious moisture in her eyes. But Patty Kate was so intent upon peering into the darkness that she did not see nor hear. Presently she was recalled with a question.

"What is your name, child?"

"Patty Kate."

Mrs. Parkinson uttered a low moan. "I might have guessed the latter," said she finally, "but I had no idea of the first." She closed her eyes and murmured reminiscently. "They called me Patty—once."

Patty Kate's eyes lighted. "Oh, did they? Then that makes us relations, doesn't it?"

"Sort of," agreed the old lady. She rested her thin, cold hand on Patty Kate's warm little one. "You were telling me of some kind of an idea you had."

Patty Kate smiled and nodded. She had begun to fear that her gorgeous plan had been sidetracked. "It's this, Granny"—the name slipped out quite unconsciously and apparently was unnoticed by each of them—"we're two lonesome people. You've lost your folks and I've lost mine. You don't like being here alone, and I fairly hate the orphanage. Why don't we 'dopt each other?" Then, fearful of objections, she hurried on: "Of course I'm not the kind of child you'd naturally 'dopt, but I'll try to suit you. And I'm liable to get fatter, even if my hair won't never curl."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Oh, everything," returned Patty Kate with the wisdom of experience. "Visitors to the Philistines don't never look at me twice." Then her voice took on a note of pleading. "But none of them are nice grandmothers like you. You'd never let a little thing like that stand in the way of a child's happiness, would you?"

Mrs. Parkinson dropped her head again. "God help me for a wicked old woman," she mumbled.

Patty Kate peered at her anxiously. "Is that from the play, Granny?"

"No, my dear. It's from a bleeding heart." She was shivering as if from a sudden chill.

"Here, Granny, put on my scarf," said Patty Kate solicitously. Then almost unconsciously she began from the play: "*'Tis bitter cold—*"

"*—And I am sick at heart,*" finished the old lady in a voice that her intimates would never have recognized. The storm of emotions which had been gathering now broke in its fury. She had been utterly cruel if not downright wicked. No one had a right to make playthings of children's immortal souls or, as Patty Kate had put it, "stand in the way of a child's happiness."

But Patty Kate was clapping her hands. "Oh, splendid! You'd be good in a play, Granny." She caught the thin old hands eagerly. "Oh, say, you will come to our 'Hamlet,' won't you?"

Mrs. Parkinson began to react quite after her old forceful manner.

"I will not!" she snapped with quick decision. "It isn't going to be. It's an outrage—a travesty on Christmas. I'm not going to let them have it."

Patty Kate didn't understand much of the speech, but the last statement registered forcefully. "Not have it?" she echoed unhappily. This was too much. Mrs.

Parkinson had ignored her proposal of mutual adoption and now she was going to prevent the play. Patty could have shed tears of disappointment if she had not been trained to school her emotions.

"No," returned Mrs. Parkinson, not noting the trembling lips. "We're going to have a Christmas tree instead, with songs and Santa Claus and games and presents—celebrate in the good old-fashioned way." She was pacing the floor, making plans.

"Where?" asked Patty Kate, trying to keep up with her. "In the Philistine home," she added dispiritedly.

"No, right here," returned Mrs. Parkinson, indicating her beautiful home and grounds. "That awful name. We'll change it—I'm the worst Philistine of all. We'll light the whole house and have presents for every child. You'll like that just as well, won't you, Patty Kate?" she paused to ask. In her eagerness Patty Kate's scarf had dropped unheeded to the floor.

"It will be nicer," admitted Patty Kate, picking up the scarf and turning toward the window. It was time for her to go, and as Mrs. Parkinson had refused to consider her plan there was really no reason for staying longer. "It's awful late," she said. "I'd better be going. Could you tell me where to find the ladder?"

Mrs. Parkinson started in surprise. "Child, aren't you willing to stay with me?"

Patty Kate looked at her uncertainly. "Yes'm, I want to," she faltered, "but not less'n you want me."

"I want you more than anything else in the world, little granddaughter." She caught the child to her hungrily and blessed Patty Kate's ears with words which she had almost despaired of ever hearing. "You aren't ever going back to the orphanage again."

"*For this relief much thanks!*" burst involuntarily from Patty Kate. It was the final renunciation of her beloved "Hamlet," and she gave it up willingly. The warmth in her grandmother's face was a more alluring thing to Patty Kate. She snuggled up close and yielded to a long-belated loving.

Presently from the depths of an embrace so tight that Patty Kate almost feared her ribs would crack, she heard her grandmother's subdued voice.

"Will you do something for me, Patty Kate?"

"Oh, Granny, you know I will! What is it?"

Very hesitatingly came the words. It was almost as if the proud old lady feared the request would again make of her a weeping Niobe. Nevertheless, she proffered it, and it marked the dawning of a new spirit in her life, saner, happier, benignant.

"Tell me," she said, "about the bird of dawning."

THE END

A SHRINE

WITHIN my life I've builded
A temple, love, for thee;
With gold the roof is gilded,
The walls are porphyry.

Within its dusk peace lingers
Sweet as an old perfume,
Or hush that follows singers
In gray cathedral's gloom.

And there till time shall falter,
And earth be but a name—
My heart shall be the altar
Whereon thy love shall flame!

Arthur Wallace Peach.

To Babylon

By LARRY BARRETTO

Author of "A Conqueror Passes," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I AND II.

ANTHONY THORNE tires of his uneventful life in Slaterville, a sleepy Middle West town, and determines to follow his friend, Luke Jackson, in seeking a career in New York. He tells Judith Gray of his plan, and asks her to marry him, but she will not consent to their engagement at that time, as she thinks it unfair to both. Anthony's plans are checked by his father's illness. Later his mother's servant girl, Cornelia, gives birth to a baby, and in her hysterical desire to protect her lover, places the responsibility upon Anthony. Judith believes in him, and Anthony faces the scandal, which dies down after the girl has exonerated him.

Disgusted with Slaterville, Anthony leaves for the metropolis, where he succeeds in obtaining a position in the office of Robert S. Hilary, an architect. At a party in Greenwich Village, Anthony's good looks and refreshingly new point of view attract the attention of Elenore Laidlaw, wife of a wealthy broker, and she invites him to call, and later to dine at her imposing residence.

CHAPTER XI.

BANQUET HALLS.

THE night of Mrs. Laidlaw's dinner was clear and cold. The stars above the city, twinkling spots of blue and white ice, were rivaled by the maze of lights below, whose yellow glow gave a fictitious warmth to the streets where they were most thickly clustered.

People hurried, their breath white on the thin air, not pausing to look into the shop windows where already diaphanous gowns were being displayed in expectation of southern and Mediterranean trips, or into the florists where behind the cold glass exotic flowers bloomed, forced into rich perfection to fade in a day. New York was as usual a month ahead of itself, whirling around feverishly, cramming into hours the sensations of weeks, intent and alert, always staring ahead to something just beyond—a huge vortex, a maelstrom into which its humans were plunged to strike out blindly, believing they were fulfilling a destiny of which they had no comprehension.

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The frantic pace of it stung Anthony into exhilaration. It was exactly what he had hoped to find. The physical weariness which was often upon him now seemed a sign of accomplishment, but it was as often forgotten under the impact of new impressions, further stimulus driving him on again. At last he believed he had found the essence of the city.

He swung along the crowded streets, nerves taut, unconscious of the fact that he had worked desperately hard all day and that he had not got to bed the night before until two o'clock. Around him traffic streamed in masses which threatened destruction that was amazingly avoided at the last moment; above him the towers flung themselves against the sapphire sky, spectral in the night, but Anthony did not look up—the streets were more amusing.

It was late when he arrived at the house on Sixty-Second Street, but as yet no guests were there. The footman who took his hat and coat told him that Mrs. Laidlaw would be down presently and ushered him into the room where they had had tea. Anthony felt on a different footing now; he wandered about the room examining it with casual interest, glancing through a recent book, no longer disconcerted by the cold eyes of the old woman in the portrait. Still nobody came.

At last he heard the door open and presently a girl entered the room. Anthony's first impression was of her hair—a mass of clouded gold, so very fine that it would not be restrained but broke loose in irrepressible waves about her head. The soft lights on the wall brackets caught it and sent it glinting. The oval of her face was shadowed by it so that it seemed to tinge her smooth skin to the color of cream ivory, the pallor of which was intensified by her mouth, the lips slightly reddened. It was beautifully formed and drooped with an expression at once wistful and petulant.

Her eyes, gray or violet, one could not determine which, were wide and with a perpetual question in them. Anthony noticed her thin, high-bridged nose and involuntarily glanced at the portrait. The girl and the old woman were alike to that extent and no more. She was an exquisite thing, so dazzling that the man had no words. He stood staring stupidly and it was not until they were seated at dinner that he realized that her gown was rose color or that her arms were too thin for absolute beauty.

She came forward, composed under his continued regard, and spoke to him pleasantly. He noticed that she spoke with the same well-bred indifference that Mrs. Laidlaw did.

"Elenore's late, of course. I suppose we might as well introduce ourselves. I'm Ludlow Seton."

Anthony recovered enough to smile at her. "I'm very early, I'm afraid, but I thought with the opera— Oh, yes, my name is Anthony Thorne." In some confusion he felt the quick color flaring into his cheeks.

Miss Seton did not seem to notice it. "I know," she nodded. "Elenore told me you were coming. A prodigy out of the West or something. I must meet you. Are you a prodigy?"

"I don't know," said Anthony, much embarrassed. "No, of course not. Mrs. Laidlaw shouldn't say things like that."

"Elenore says what she pleases." She walked over and sat on the arm of a chair by the table. "I saw you looking at the picture. Do you think we look alike?"

"Very little. I thought at first—"

Miss Seton interrupted him. "She's my grandmother. Elenore's too. We're first cousins, you know." She picked up the paper-knife, slashed at a page of an uncut book with it then let it slip from her fingers to the floor. Anthony stooped forward to recover it and as he rose the satin of her dress brushed his cheek and he smelled the odor of mignonette clinging to the fabric, fresh and delicate like the scent of early spring. It caught at his breath.

"Elenore didn't adequately describe you," she said looking down at him curiously, and her laugh was cryptic.

To his relief Mrs. Laidlaw came into the room at this moment. "You see I'm home this time. How do you do?" She offered him her hand with more formality than usual. "You and Ludlow have met?" She turned her back on him. "I wish you'd

give me your maid. You pay her nothing a month and she turns you out better than mine does."

The girl laughed, a shallow musical sound. "I treat her well and that's more than you do. She'll be with me when she's a hundred. I couldn't lose her if I wanted to."

More people came into the room and were introduced. There was a Miss Bliss, angular and not young, whose thin breast was evidently stirred by no emotion but an acid humor that vastly entertained the others. Anthony wondered if she was one of the ten amusing people whom Mrs. Laidlaw knew, and then he decided she wasn't; her talk dealt too much in personalities for that.

There was a Mr. Barron, whose sleek, short-legged body reminded Anthony of a dachshund; he was growing somewhat bald in spite of efforts to preserve his hair, and his youthful devotion to Mrs. Laidlaw was obvious and pathetic. One felt that he flirted because it linked him with his own lost youth, and nobody would ever believe he could be dangerous.

Mrs. Laidlaw gave him half scornful attention, although she had no hesitancy in cutting him off in the midst of a rhetorical address on her charms, and Mr. Laidlaw himself seemed in no wise disturbed. "Stuffy" as he was called, was round and fat with a jolly red face that suited his hearty manner. He might have looked more comfortable in a golf suit than he did in his evening clothes and he told Anthony that the opera was an arduous duty which he was obliged to perform at stated intervals.

"I'll go to sleep before it's half over," he said. "Always do. That's why Elenore puts me in the back of the box—so I won't be seen."

During dinner Anthony learned that he was the senior partner in a brokerage house in Wall Street, and although business was "rotten" there was no evidence of it in his scale of living. The boy felt as though he had been transported to another world—the unfamiliar dishes put before him, the noiseless and efficient servants always at his elbow, the light flow of talk about people and places with which he was unfamiliar, all emphasized his strangeness and made him shy. He overcame it with an effort. These people must not think him a tongue-tied lout. Ludlow Seton, by his side, was speaking to him:

"Elenore has told me all about you. I think it is wonderful of you to come to New York to find new opportunities. It shows so much initiative. None of the men I know would bother to do anything like that. They're content to stay just where they are. I like men who do things." She turned directly to him with her dazzling smile. Anthony had the same feeling of slight dizziness.

"Do you, really? I couldn't tell you why I came except, as you say, to find new opportunities. I hardly visualized them because I didn't know what they were; just something inside me kept impelling me to move on."

"I understand," she said softly, and held him with her glance.

Her words immediately put them on a more intimate basis. Anthony felt sure of her sympathy and comprehension. He bent forward eagerly. "Maybe it is presumptuous of me to think I can in any degree 'conquer' the big city, but there is something in me that makes me try. I would rather fail trying than never to have made the attempt."

"I'm sure you can," she encouraged him. "Look at Stuffy. He didn't have anything when he started. Of course, Elenore had money, but Stuffy was pretty well established before they were married. If Stuffy can do it, you can."

She spoke with friendly disparagement, but Anthony looked at the little man who sat at the head of the table with new respect.

"I'd have thought he was born to the purple," he murmured. "Why do you call him Stuffy, Miss Seton?"

"Stuffy? Oh, his name is Steffens. Stuffy suits him too—" She broke off to listen to Miss Bliss.

"Poor Antoinette has lost all her money," she was saying in a slightly nasal voice with a twinkle in her eyes that belied her sorrow.

"That's too bad," rumbled little Mr. Laidlaw. "I heard she was pinched when Dennis, McKim went to the wall. She should have let me handle her investments, but naturally I couldn't suggest it. Has she anything left?"

Miss Bliss shook her head. "Only a few thousand a year. Of course, she has always squandered her money. It has been going out like water ever since she became interested in drunken sailors—no, I mean aged sailors. They came after prisoners and captives, didn't they? Well, anyway I understand she went to the trustees of the home which she has practically endowed and tried to get some of it back. They wouldn't do it, but they offered to let her live there. Poor Antoinette!"

There was a shriek of laughter at the thought of Miss Antoinette Colman sharing a sailors' home.

"She should have a guardian," said Mr. Barron precisely. "She is very eccentric, of course, but then most unmarried women of sixty are. Imagine giving all your money away to sailors!"

"You're not married, Dick," Mrs. Laidlaw pointed out maliciously.

"I'm not sixty, either," he retorted tartly.

"Who are you leaving your money to, Kitty?" Mr. Laidlaw asked Miss Bliss. Anthony was rather startled; these people seemed on most familiar terms.

"I expect to die when I'm forty," she said deliberately, "and I'm dividing it up each year so that there won't be any left." She paused defiantly, but nobody cared to take up the challenge, so she changed the subject easily. "Marjorie Pendennis is going to get a divorce. Mental anguish. She said she dreamed every night that Fred beat her and it was wrecking her health."

"Kitty, you are one of the most amusing liars I know," said Mrs. Laidlaw.

"If she is going to die when she is forty, we have a five-year old ghost at the table with us," whispered Ludlow Seton to Anthony.

Anthony tried to imagine such a conversation around any supper table in Slaterville, but it was impossible. These people with their wealth, their position, their wide interest were, after all, human, but more than that they entertained him. He felt flattered at the way they casually accepted him as one of themselves; he felt instinctively pleased that no special effort was made to bring him into the talk, and already it seemed as if he had shared their lives for years. Ludlow Seton was a beautiful thing—never had he seen so lovely a girl, and she was obviously friendly, too. He was interested in everything he heard even when he did not understand. Dinner was a great success.

Mrs. Laidlaw stood up at last. "Give you five minutes for cigarettes," she told the men. "We're late to the opera now."

When the women had gone the three men drew their chairs closer together on one side of the table. The butler offered each of them a tray with cigarettes and cigars on it and a tiny spirit lamp whose bright flame cast a reflection on the polished silver.

"Take a cigar," Mr. Laidlaw suggested to Anthony. "We really have plenty of time. It's a double bill to-night and we are going to miss the first part." He was evidently determined to shorten by as much as possible the hour of his tribulation.

"No, thanks. This is very nice." Anthony lighted the long, thin, Russian cigarette with the hollow space at one end.

"Mrs. Laidlaw likes those Russian things, but these are better." Mr. Laidlaw opened a case of striped gold which was filled with fat, tightly stuffed cigarettes.

Anthony drew the aromatic smoke into his lungs and smiled polite refusal. "These are more of a novelty to me. They don't have them where I come from."

"Somewhere out West, isn't it? I know. Mrs. Laidlaw told me about you. So you've come to New York to carve out a place for yourself. Well, that's the right thing to do. Horace Greeley's advice seems to be reversed these days. We need you, of course. There's plenty of room. I believe the old town would die of dry rot if it were not for the new blood that pours into it all the time. It keeps us on our toes—something stimulating in having a lot of young fellows about whose eyes are on success and who won't be kept down—but for

you—" he looked at the boy's crisp hair, his alert face, the evening clothes that did not fit too well—"but for you—" He broke off, his eyes cloudy with memories.

"For me what?" Anthony prompted him. "It sounds like a death sentence."

Mr. Laidlaw sipped his chartreuse and set the glass on the table. "Not that," he said, "and yet it might be. What I was going to say is, but for you I hope success won't come too quickly. The struggle you know, is often sweeter than achievement. I sometimes think that what most of us fight for are false rewards." He smiled in a friendly manner.

"If you'll take a little advice from a much older man, Thorne, I would suggest that you have a very clear picture in your own mind as to what you want success to be. Don't fight on for years to attain something that may in the end prove a death sentence to you. That is such a pitiful waste, and so many of us do it."

Anthony felt sobered. There was a certain implication in what the other man said; he felt that he was speaking with intention, but he did not entirely understand to what purpose.

"I'm an architect, or rather I want to be," he said, stating his case directly. "I'm tremendously interested in building—it seems to me so essential from all points of view. It is the basis of everything. I suppose man's first step upward was when he came down from the tree-tops and found a cave for himself. Now no business can be carried on without shelter of some sort, and with our centers of population growing more congested, the housing problem grows more urgent. It can no longer be considered in a haphazard manner, but requires careful planning.

"Besides—" he hesitated, feeling somewhat shy—"besides I think that building is perhaps the most permanent contribution to beauty. There is still a definite advance in architecture. Look at our towers here in New York. They are new, but nobody can deny their beauty. The nearest approach to them is the cathedrals and minsters of Europe and England, and they are still the marvel of their age. There will be further developments. I think—" He broke off, his eyes shining, but somewhat embarrassed by his own enthusiasm. "New York seems pretty well built up after all. It's impertinent of me to come here, a stranger, and tell you what I'm going to do with your city." His laugh was deprecating.

"It is a good vision," said Mr. Laidlaw slowly. "Something to hold on to. By the way, we are not New Yorkers, or rather you are only a more recent New Yorker. I came originally from St. Paul and Barron here came all the way from San Francisco. You were headed for Europe, weren't you, Dick, and got side-tracked?"

"It is so long ago I don't remember," said Mr. Barron, who had carefully eradicated all traces of his Western upbringing and did not like to be reminded of it. "At any rate my reasons for coming to New York were not to make money like you, Stuffy. I came because there is a culture here that is lacking out West, and the people are intelligent and charming."

"I should have thought you were English rather than Eastern, Mr. Barron, and I would never have dreamed that you came from the Coast," said Anthony who sometimes intentionally capitalized his gift for saying what people wanted to hear.

Mr. Barron was pleased. "Probably that is because when I lived out West my thoughts were centered on the East, and now that I live in the East my thoughts are centered on Europe. It is always a progression forward with me."

"He'll end up in China yet." Mr. Laidlaw winked amiably at Anthony. "Anyway, Dick didn't have to come East to make money; he had it when he arrived." He stood up. "I suppose we'll have to go. Elenore has her coat on."

"Money is pretty essential," said Anthony as they walked toward the door. "Especially when you haven't got it."

"Yes," Laidlaw answered quickly. "But money should be the result of work. Don't work for that result. Hold to your vision, boy."

Anthony, glancing back at the handsome dining room, its walls hung with tapestries, sideboard and table gleaming with silver and fragile glass, wondered if Mr. Laidlaw

had always kept that in mind when he first came to New York from St. Paul.

Le Coq D'Or was being sung at the Metropolitan this night and as it was already late few people lingered in the lobby. Anthony's party hurried up the shallow steps to the Laidlaw box. The women were completely bundled in their wraps of rich and brilliant material with the broad collars of white, gray and brown fur which had gleaming lights in it. The night was cold even in the heated motor. A woman attendant came forward and unlocked the box, then followed them in to hang up the coats. She smiled the deferential smile of one who has known her patrons for a long time, and Mr. Laidlaw thrust his hand into his pocket. His wife moved forward with Miss Bliss and Ludlow Seton and took possession of the front of the box. Mr. Barron sat directly behind them, and Laidlaw thrust Anthony past him.

"Sit there. You'll want to see and I want to sleep. Wake me when Galli comes on. She's the only thing in it I can understand."

The boy had a startled impression of a vast auditorium, rising tier on tier, massed with faces, bare arms, white shirt fronts, to the very top of the house where tiny dark figures leaned over brass railings, staring directly down into the pit from the dizzy heights above. In the semi-circle of boxes where he sat and in those in the next tier it was possible to distinguish the features of faces that became a white blur in the distance, and when many opera glasses were leveled at the late arrivals they became at once like strange beetles with protruding black eyes, staring intent, the arms like white feelers raised and held in suspended animation by curiosity.

Throughout the house there was a subdued glow of color, lights reflecting on the gleam of satins—rose, cream, lavender, pearl-gray, lustrous and glowing, picked out here and there by stark black and white. A faint hum of conversation arose, drowsy and indolent, again like insects, punctuated by sharp, impatient clapping from the top gallery—the whirring of crickets on a warm day.

Then the lights died and the orchestra with a minor wail of violins that increased in passionate volume swept into the overture. Presently an old man in a long robe and a curious pointed hat on his head tottered across the stage and as he walked he sang in a voice so youthful, so rich, that it seemed impossible it could come from the bent figure. It was not until the curtain rose that Anthony realized that the singers were banked on the sides of the stage and that he was watching pantomimists.

For the first time since he had come to New York Anthony definitely lost himself. He sat bent forward, oblivious to the house, to the people about him, conscious only of the sensuous music tightening his throat, which he had never heard before and yet seemed always to have known. Occasionally Mrs. Laidlaw spoke; he did not hear her. Behind him Mr. Laidlaw snored peacefully; it blended with the drone of the violins. Ludlow Seton dropped a white glove at his feet; he let it lie unheeded.

Incomprehensible things were happening on the stage. Before a back-drop of brilliant turrets which seemed to be Eastern and were architecturally unstable the mummers danced and wept at strange crises. A beautiful woman rode in for a moment on the back of what had been a white swan—thin giants with flaming red hair leaped to and fro. A golden bird cried warnings at intervals.

Even during the intermission Anthony did not move. He was not aware that Mrs. Laidlaw had been looking at him with amused eyes during most of the act, or that she had signaled the girl not to speak. The lights were dimmed again. Two soldiers were dead, their foreheads pressed together; a mad moon rode across the sky at a speed defying natural law; a silken marquee rose miraculously from the ground and from it issued dozens of dancers. The princess again. She was tempting the old man, whirling about him, mocking him, her eyes, her gleaming hair, her white arms a lure. And now Anthony became conscious of his own body.

The music rose in waves about him, strangling him, submerging him in painful ecstasy. As if he were an adolescent again he was fighting the emotions within himself.

Every move of the baffled king on the stage was duplicated in him. His arms ached with the torment of unfulfillment, he was tortured with desire, and in the end he knew the bitterness of defeat.

He had moved forward nearer the front of the box and quite without realization he took Ludlow Seton's hand in his. After one startled glance she understood and let it remain although at times the pressure of his fingers hurt her. She had not before come in contact with a passion so primitive, so near the surface that it could be unleashed by the mere sound of music. If she had only known, it was a thing which could never happen again and that Anthony might sit through the same opera many times, outwardly phlegmatic, and probably with never again such inner turmoil; but it was his first time and he had been caught unguarded.

The girl was stirred by it and the music took on a new poignancy, became more vivid. Her intuition told her that this was no mere vulgar gesture, but that the man had been shaken out of control of himself, and so she let her hand remain in his, not unnaturally attributing to herself some measure of his emotion. She knew that she was beautiful. It thrilled her with a sense of her own power while at the same time she reflected something of the fire that glowed within him. Before the end of the act she quietly released her hand, but Mrs. Laidlaw had seen and she wondered, amused, what the boy's next letter to that Western girl—Judith—would be like.

Anthony was rather white when the lights at last went up, and his thanks to Mrs. Laidlaw were not quite coherent.

"I'm glad you liked it," she said quietly. "I enjoyed it, too—more than usual."

Stuffy woke up and yawned. "I wasn't asleep," he proclaimed. "Scotney is in very good voice, I should say." He noticed Anthony's white face, his overbright eyes. "Oh, Lord, to be young," he thought and yawned again. Barron and Miss Bliss were putting on wraps. There was still a slight tenseness, an air of expectancy, of waiting, and to shatter the dream that held her Ludlow spoke mockingly to Anthony, using conventional words:

"You never spoke to me once through the entire opera. Really it has never happened before. I'm jealous of Galli."

He rose to her cue. "I'm sorry—it was terribly rude of me. No, it wasn't Galli. If you'll let me take you home I'll talk all the time. I've a lot to say."

They were walking down the steps to the lower floor, being jostled by the crowd that was pouring out to the exits. Mrs. Laidlaw called back to them over her shoulder:

"We'll drop Ludlow on our way uptown. That will be easier."

A mutinous look came over the girl's face; the droop of her mouth changed from wistfulness to petulance. "I think I'd rather take a taxi if you don't mind, Elenore. My dress was crushed coming down." Which was untrue, but as Mrs. Laidlaw reflected, she had known and understood Ludlow too long to attempt to thwart her. She wondered a bit indignantly if her experiment was going beyond the limits she had prescribed for it.

There was very little said in the taxi after all. Both were seeking youthfully to recapture a mood that was past. Ludlow Seton glanced at the man beside her. His face had fallen into stern lines, and he sat very erect, conscious of the novelty of taking a girl home from the opera for the first time. He really was extraordinarily handsome, she thought, and wondered what he would be like when his air of constraint had worn off.

"You held my hand. Why?" she asked abruptly and experimentally.

Anthony started. The street lights flashing past awoke the quiet of her face so that it seemed alive with fleeting emotions. Her eyes were averted and he could not tell of what she was thinking.

"I did not realize it at first, and later—well I could not help myself," he said honestly. "Are you angry?"

"No," she answered and turned her lovely eyes full on him. "I understood."

He was grateful that she said no more, and his gratitude was heightened by her comprehension. A warm glow invaded him and the emotions which had torn him sank to quiet happiness. He had been very much alone; now the city was taking on a new

meaning. He looked out at the friendly side streets obscured by the darkness, but palpitant with hidden life, and smiled thoughtfully. What would Slaterville think?

The car drew up to the door of a great brown house, its lower windows barred with curved iron. Anthony was impressed; it seemed even larger than the Laidlaws'—older, perhaps, and somber. Anthony paid the chauffeur and dismissed him. "I'm going to walk down to cool my head."

They lingered for a moment in the shelter of the doorway. "I live here with my great-aunt," the girl was saying. "My father and mother are dead, you know. Would you like to come and see me? It's lonely sometimes, this big house."

"She looked like an exquisite flower, too fragile to stand alone against a rude blast, her face wistful beneath the aureole of her spun gold hair.

"I wanted to ask if I might," he answered much moved. "May I come soon?"

Ludlow rang the bell and a sleepy maid opened the door at once. She must have been waiting in the hall. "Yes, please come soon," she called back to him as the door shut, and her voice sounded like the thin echo of the music he had just heard. It sent him swinging down the street, not knowing where he was going or caring, the blood pounding in his veins to a steady rhythm.

Ludlow Seton sat before her mirror, a pale blue peignoir edged with swansdown drawn about her bare shoulders. He had a curious vitality; he seemed so much more alive than the other men she knew. Elenore was right about him, but it was not right to take him up as a new plaything.

"Stop pulling my hair," she said to the maid behind her. "How do you expect me to think when you're so rough!"

CHAPTER XII.

AN ENCOUNTER.

ANTHONY had seen Ludlow perhaps a dozen times before he met her great-aunt. He had called once formally, and had later taken the girl out to tea. She had expressed the wish to see a certain play and that evening he telephoned her that he had tickets for the following night.

It was a popular piece and he had to get the seats from a speculator, which was expensive, but all things considered, it was worth it. People had stared at the beautiful fair girl—it gave him a feeling of proprietorship not unpleasant—and he was not at all aware that half the glances were directed at his own well-shaped head and regular features, or that women smiled in sympathy when his flashing smile lightened the darkness of his face.

They had met once at Mrs. Laidlaw's, but that had been quite by accident, although Ludlow's cousin had not believed it. She said nothing, however, intent on the study of naïve emotions exposed before her. People, some people, she was wont to say, interested her more than things, and possibly her obscure speculations compensated for some lack in her own life.

She could be happy in her game if she felt assured that she might remain aloof, not becoming too deeply involved in the delicate spider-like threads that she wove. Her purpose with Anthony had not been definitely planned, nor had she much thought of the consequence; she had been curious to know what the reactions of an unsophisticated boy already in love would be to a girl, very beautiful, and definitely out of his class as Ludlow was, and the night at the opera had been an amusing justification of her own beliefs. Beyond that she had not considered and she was to a certain degree annoyed when she found that they were meeting for tea frequently. Then she had shrugged it aside philosophically. Ludlow as well as herself had inherited certain traits from their arrogant grandmother, and young Thorne was in no sense her protégé.

The meetings had at first not been frequent, but as the winter wore on to a late and chilly spring it had become the custom for them to set aside a place and hour for at least one day in the week. There were other times of course when the girl wished to go somewhere and Anthony with no engagements was an eager and attractive escort; she used him without realizing it as something which was her due.

It was pleasant and he enjoyed it; the

people he met were amiable and good-naturedly indifferent to anything but their own pleasure—not possessing quite the master intellects he had endowed them with during his first days in the city, but for all that as agreeable companions as one could wish for. And they accepted him cheerfully without question. It was only necessary to be entertaining to have them like you, and here Anthony was not conscious of any effort.

It was expensive, however. His clothes, he found, would have to be renewed and added to. It was amazing the number of garments that were necessary for casual functions, and it was some time before he became accustomed to his stockinged legs in a golf suit. This for one week-end out of town. It all cost money and there had been an evening of bridge in which his inexperience had been combined with disastrous cards that had drained his slender resources. Half a cent had seemed an absurdly low stake until the total had been presented to him. He had glanced at it, his face rather white, and then drew out a cheque book.

"Do you mind?" he asked trying to smile nonchalantly at the stout woman who had been his opponent. Her bare arms were like chunks of raw beef and her ample breast glittered with diamonds.

"Not at all," she answered stuffing the slip of paper into a mesh bag already overflowing with bills. "You had poor cards, Mr. Thorne. Why do you bid so high on spades? Are they lucky?"

It must never happen again, he assured himself; and it did not to quite so unfortunate an extent, for he had armed himself with books on that elusively facile game and studied them nights, although it took time from the work and reading he had planned for himself. He dutifully recorded his doings, or most of them, for the benefit of his mother and Judith at home, but his letters now were growing more infrequent. For one thing he did not have the time, and for another he was losing the tourist's sense of the pictorial—New York had not become commonplace but familiar, and his descriptive efforts were no longer significant.

More and more he was writing of people he knew or had just met, casual mention of music and plays, restaurants and hotels that must of necessity be strange to both women. And so quite without his willing it the gulf between New York and Slaterville grew wider.

May had come and with it the first fuzz of green in the parks before he met Miss Pendleton, the great-aunt. It had hurt him a little that he had never been invited to the house, but he knew that there was not much entertaining done there and that the old lady was very frail. The glamour of Ludlow's companionship held him and he was content with what she offered. The friendship between them had not as nearly touched on the sentimental or emotional theme as it had the first night at the opera, and Anthony had said nothing about Judith. After all, he reflected, there was nothing to say; no engagement existed and it seemed hardly pertinent to introduce the subject. Ludlow was completely incurious about his past. He had, of course, told the story to Mrs. Laidlaw, but that seemed a long time ago, and Mrs. Laidlaw was a clever woman, much older, who usually had no difficulty in finding out things that might interest her. Her experience told her that there must have been some love affair in the boy's life, however trivial, but Ludlow simply did not think of it. She lived in the present.

It was Miss Pendleton who finally arranged the meeting.

"Who is this young man you are always seeing?" she demanded of her great-niece. "I don't seem to recollect the name. I cannot remember any Thornes."

"He's a very nice young man," Ludlow answered hurriedly, knowing her great-aunt's propensity for family. "He comes from Slaterville."

"Slaterville." The old lady examined her delicate porcelain fingers, so thin that they seemed transparent, as if to derive help for her failing memory from them. "I never heard of that either. You had better invite him to dinner so I can see him. Young people comport themselves with such extraordinary laxity these days." The edict had gone forth.

"Come to dinner to-morrow night," the

girl suggested to Anthony. "My aunt wants to look you over. She's very old you know and I humor her. We can go out later because she goes to bed at nine o'clock."

"I'd love to." He was pleased as always.

"You might bring me some flowers, Tony—" It had come to this now. "I'll wear them." She smiled at him with her lovely eyes which might have been violet if they were not gray.

It was only seven o'clock when Anthony rang the bell of the Pendleton house because the hour for dinner had never been advanced to a more fashionable time. Miss Pendleton had a horror of innovations. Her father had dined at six and it was only for Ludlow's sake that she had been willing to make this change. The maid took his hat and coat, slipped his stick into the rack by the door and left him in the library, which opened off the hall.

It was a dark room, somber like the rest of the house, but with a heavy magnificence about it that redeemed the gloom. Windows, with diamond panes of thick glass, were set in deep embrasures and curtained as if to shut out any faint ray of light that might creep in from without. Indeed it was always necessary to have lights. Now many wax candles, very tall, burned in sconces and cast their glow on the bookcases that lined the wall, filled with uniform bindings, very old and worn, but with the beauty of their tooled gold leather still apparent. The overstuffed furniture was enormous and evidently immovable. It had been planned for wherever it stood. The pictures against the dim green and buff wall-paper had darkened with age or faded until the subjects at a distance were not discernible. An odor of dried flowers and faint camphor hung over all.

From the library could be seen the stairs with slim banisters, curving at a landing and leading to the upper part of the house. Beyond the hall to which the stairs led was the dining room. As Anthony watched, Ludlow appeared coming down to join him. Against the dark background of paneled wood she looked more ethereal than ever, her lovely head bent as if the weight of her fair hair made it too heavy for her slight shoulders. The yellow light gleamed in the folds of her white satin gown and mellowed it. The man stared up, a catch in his throat. She had been created to rouse emotions.

As she came up to him he handed her a box. "Here are the flowers."

Ludlow unfastened the string, tossed the cover on the floor and pulled back the tissue paper. "Oh, Tony, how sweet!" She took out a dozen tiny roses, pale yellow, their half-closed petals deepening almost to gold at the centers. The stems had been wrapped in green-gilt paper and a large pin was thrust through it ready to be fastened to the gown. She held them against her breast.

"But I couldn't wear them, could I?" she added regretfully. "They're too yellow for this dress. How stupid of me. But it was dear of you to bring them. How would this be?" She caught a handful of vivid blue larkspur from a vase and pinned them at her belt. "That's better. And you shall have a spray for your buttonhole. Stand still while I fix it. Tony, I love your roses."

She sniffed their delicate fragrance once and laid them on the table.

"Let's go into the dining room. Aunt Anna will be down in a minute. She has to be helped and doesn't like strangers to see her."

They were already seated at the long refectory table when Miss Pendleton entered the room and Anthony rose again to draw out her chair. She was tall and so thin that her black dress clung to her body in straight lines. There were touches of white veiling at her wrists and neck, but it was no whiter than her skin, which was drawn tight like parchment and delicately veined in blue at her temples and at her throat where the flesh had fallen away, leaving shadows that did not hide the gauntness.

She moved slowly, leaning on a cane, and there was about her a brittle quality as though she might break at any sudden movement. A maid walked behind her intent on the difficult progress, a cashmere shawl over one arm. The old woman's hair was white also and covered with a black lace cap to hide its scarceness. Her

arrogant nose like her sister's in the portrait at Mrs. Laidlaw's had shrunk to a beak, and only her eyes were vital—cold and intense.

In spite of her infirmities she moved to her place with very great dignity, and Anthony was much impressed. She must have been eighty.

"Leave the shawl on a chair," she told the maid. "I will ring if I need you." Her voice was shadowy like her face, but it did not falter. "Tell them to serve dinner. Ludlow, present him."

"Aunt Anna, this is Mr. Thorne. You asked to meet him. Tony, my great-aunt."

Miss Pendleton sat at the head of the long table which stretched away in the obscurity of the room, empty at the far end save where the spode bowls filled with fruit made white spots on the dark wood. Ludlow and Anthony sat on one side of her, their chairs placed close in order that she might hear. The four candles in their fluted sticks burned straight and unwavering in the still air and reflected other tiny candles on heavy silver whose crests were almost worn away.

Two maids began to pass the courses, removing and replacing serving plates that were museum pieces. Miss Pendleton did not have men servants. That custom had been hallowed by age, but where two women lived alone it could hardly be considered. The maids presented each dish to her, and after a glance she invariably refused it. She never ate anything but food specially prepared for her, nevertheless they must go through the pretense of serving her first. Presently a bowl of broth and later some steamed rice was set before her.

"What Thorne are you?" she asked Anthony. "Years and years ago, before you can remember, I knew Ariadne Thorne, but she died without children and I had supposed her the last of the line. Is it by chance a collateral branch?"

"I don't know," he answered, "but I think not. My family moved West from Pennsylvania a good many years ago. They never lived in New York."

Ludlow had not looked forward to this dinner with any anticipation. She was well aware of her great-aunt's outspoken qualities and she had many forebodings and little faith. Now she interrupted impatiently:

"I explained all that to you, Aunt Anna, but you have forgotten." To Anthony she said in a breath, her lips barely moving: "She is eighty-six years old and does not remember very well."

"I remember perfectly," said the old lady in her thin, paperlike voice, turning her cold eyes on her great-niece. "It is because of the emeralds this afternoon that you say that." She explained to Anthony: "I have some emeralds, very good stones, a clear green, and Ludlow wants them. She will have them—eventually, but not now. Young girls do not wear emeralds."

Ludlow smiled at Anthony with perfect resignation. "How do you know, dear? You haven't been out in years."

"Young girls of breeding do not wear emeralds," Miss Pendleton amplified her statement, and there the matter rested.

She turned to Anthony again. "It might possibly have been Ariadne. I knew no other Thornes. Ariadne was a wild girl."

The young people glanced at each other, their eyes smiling. "Are you trying to pin a bar sinister on poor Tony? Really, Aunt Anna, and at dinner!"

"When I say 'wild' I do not mean that an indelicacy of any sort was possible to Ariadne," Miss Pendleton explained with dignity. "No daughter of Jessup and Lavinia could so far forget herself. You persist in misunderstanding me, Ludlow."

The meal dragged on through an entrée, the chicken in timbales, a salad and eventually dessert, but Anthony was entertained. Miss Pendleton was filled with reminiscences that had a charming flavor of an older and simpler world about them. Ludlow wriggled uncomfortably, but she had heard the stories many times before.

"You met at the opera, I understand."

"At Mrs. Laidlaw's first," Anthony corrected her. "We went on to the opera later. Coq D'Or. Scotney was singing the leading rôle—I was much moved." He glanced at Ludlow shyly.

"I have only been in this opera house once; it is of quite recent construction,"

said Miss Pendleton with an air of disapproval. "And I do not know the piece you speak of—nor the singer, of course. I remember Parepa Rose—not so long ago either. There was a voice for you! She was enormously fat you understand—gross; and once, in "Martha" I think it was, she got stuck going through the window. Two stage hands had to assist her and it marred the performance, but people forgave her because of her voice. It was golden."

Anthony laughed. "I almost wish I had lived then in order to see the city grow. Even now it is fascinating to trace its progress step by step on old maps and deeds."

Miss Pendleton raised her delicate hands in negation. "On the contrary it is rather sad. Old people go, old landmarks pass to be replaced by these terrible structures that shadow the streets, and there is a bustle and confusion that seems to me senseless if not dangerous, but then I am an old woman. I can remember when Fifty-Ninth Street was a waste and Forty-Second Street not much better. Thirty-Fourth Street was pleasant, but the nicer people lived below.

"We really lived then—driving in our victorias, not these rushing motors one sees now. Each day had its simple occupations and we found happiness in their simplicity. There was shopping in the morning and household duties, calls to make in the afternoon; in the evening entertaining, which is a forgotten art, or occasionally a new piece at the theater. Society was really society then. Now I look through this innovation called the Social Register and I wonder what it is all about. How can there be a society when you have to put it in a book? In my day we remembered all the names it was necessary to know."

"Oh, Lord," thought Ludlow, "where *is* the dessert? Tony really has good manners—he looks happy." Aloud she said: "But Aunt Anna, the city had to grow to take care of all the new people. We couldn't live as you did in eighteen-forty or fifty. Think, dear, subways and street cars and the big buildings and the elevated that you detest had to be built in order to take care of them all. We'll have aerial railways next." Her voice was soft as one speaking to a foolish child.

"I trust I'll be dead then. Things falling on the roof! Also I know that the population increases. That is in the hands of God. But I am sure He never meant it to increase at the rate it has with all these immigrants coming in from Europe and the South and the West as well. To me it is flouting Divine wisdom. Our prayer books tell us to remain in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call us."

"I'm an immigrant," Anthony told her, rather embarrassed.

Miss Pendleton searched him with her intense eyes. "I had forgotten, of course," she answered courteously. "It was rude of me, but I did not mean it so. There are exceptions of necessity." Anthony wondered whether she really had forgotten. Her memory did not seem to be at fault.

Coffee at last.

Ludlow reached for her glass of water and permitted her hand to touch the boy's for the fraction of a second, her soft skin sliding past his with a caressing motion. Then she watched with pleased fascination the color flare up into his cheek. It was so easy. She herself was unstirred by such contacts, but they were in no way unpleasant. She felt rather like a scientific investigator and her curiosity was always aroused.

"We'll go into the library," she said. "Pauline, you can serve the coffee there. Come on, Tony; auntie will join us presently."

She rose and passed behind the old woman to ring the bell for her maid, and as she did so she bent down for a moment and slipped her bare young arm about the thin black shoulders and her cheek brushed her aunt's.

"You're not tired, dear?" she asked gently. Miss Pendleton did not answer. They made a charming and gracious picture.

Then she linked her arm through Anthony's and walked with him from the dining room, their feet keeping step to the marching tune she hummed. Her fair hair was on a level with his shoulder; he might have touched it with his lips.

"I think you're sweet to her," he whispered. "She's a remarkable old lady."

The girl's voice fell into clear cadences. "She's a dear and I'm devoted to her. To me she is like something very rare and precious—I wouldn't have her changed for anything."

Soon after Miss Pendleton joined them again. The same slow progress, cane tapping on the floor, the maid walking behind watchfully. She allowed herself to be seated in a high-backed chair and her transparent hands resting on the wide arms of it shone in the glow of the wood fire that had been lighted. The cashmere shawl was placed about her shoulders. To the man she seemed like an aged queen who had been enthroned, and in unconscious homage he seated himself on a low footstool nearby. Miss Pendleton's eyes were closed and she might have been busy with memories or asleep. Ludlow glanced at her watch. There was a long silence.

"Tell me about your work," said the great-aunt so suddenly to Anthony that he started. "What do you do and why? I am really interested, but at dinner you permitted a garrulous old woman to talk too much. Now begin."

It was a subject on which he could be genuinely enthusiastic and he told her all, even to something of his life in Slaterville and his plans that had developed there. Miss Pendleton nodded stiffly at intervals when he paused.

"I've made only a very small beginning," he admitted, "but they like my work and I'm getting more important work to do. It's a start."

"I know. When the present terminal at Forty-Second Street was at Madison Square and we were dragged down in horse cars we thought it a very fine place indeed. It was a start. Now we have the big new station and I suppose in time there will be another still bigger." She sighed. "Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but I think beginnings are more interesting. Don't be turned aside from them." It was in effect what Stuffy Laidlaw had said to him months before.

Ludlow stood up. "It's after nine, auntie. Aren't you tired? I thought Anthony and I would go out for a while."

Miss Pendleton stretched out her hand to her niece as if to detain her. It trembled with a slight palsy. "Do you mind staying with me this evening, Ludlow? I am a little tired, and not feeling so well—perhaps the excitement—"

Anthony stood up all compunction. "I'm sorry—"

His hostess checked him. "No. It is only the first time. Strange faces are confusing. Another time—but, of course, you will come again. I want you to. And I am only a little tired. If Ludlow does not mind staying in to-night—sometimes this big house is lonely with only the servants for companionship." She gave him her brittle fingers and Anthony bent over them.

"Of course she will," he answered for the girl. "I only hope I have not exhausted you. It has been one of the pleasantest evenings I have spent in a long time."

Miss Pendleton smiled her rare smile. It broke the severe mask of her face. "You are a nice young man," she said. "Ludlow, are you staying?"

"Of course," she answered evenly, keeping her voice placid with an effort. "You know I never go out when you are not well. I'll see you to the door, Tony." The cold old eyes regarded her with a certain sardonic amusement as she left the room with him.

"You see how it is," she whispered at the door. "I'm sorry but I couldn't go. I don't dare leave her, she's so frail." She looked at him wistfully. "Do you mind?"

"Yes." His voice was as light as her own. "But it's right for you to stay. I understand." This suggestion of secrecy between them was strangely exciting; his heart began to beat more rapidly and he breathed deeply the elusive scent that enfolded her. The light in the wrought iron lantern above them shone down on the lovely oval of her face and on the slim hand raised to her breast.

"You look like a saint," he muttered, and opened the door hurriedly. On the street he wondered what the devil he had said that for. It wasn't fair to Ludlow; it wasn't fair to Judith. Possibly his thought was presumptuous but he must not hurt Ludlow. Their friendship was too precious.

When the girl returned to the room her great-aunt had not moved in her chair. The dying firelight flickered on her face so that it seemed less human, more like delicately carved ivory. The thin hands were still extended to the faint warmth. Ludlow plumped a cushion into shape; she kicked the footstool back into place.

"If you are tired you had better go to bed," she observed.

"I am always tired, but I want to talk."

"We wanted to dance. Why can't you talk another time?"

"There may not be another time at my age," her great-aunt stated. "I want to talk and I want you to listen."

"Oh, well—" The girl was resigned. She lay down at full length on the sofa and let one satin slipper drop from her foot. The brilliants on it glittered against the dark rug.

"Ludlow, what are you doing with that young man?"

"Anthony? Nothing. What do you mean?" She turned her head to look at the old woman, her eyes wide.

"You can fool the rest of New York," said Miss Pendleton calmly, "but you can't fool me. Reserve that look for other people. I know you, my girl, as I knew your mother and her mother—and myself. You are permitting that boy to fall in love with you, and you know it. Deliberately and for no other reason than your own selfish amusement you are permitting him to become idiotic over you—more than that, you are encouraging it."

"For an old woman you are very observant," said Ludlow icily. "Did you see all that to-night?"

"I did. You touched his hand at dinner, probably to see him blush, which he did. Doubtless your foot was pressed against his, also. You linked arms with him for no reason at all except to see what the result would be, and just now you stand in front of him, posing at the door. You have no right to be beautiful."

"How did you know that?" The girl was startled. It was impossible for her aunt to have left the chair.

"The mirror there, my dear. My eyesight is in no way impaired, although my hearing may be. I suppose the mirror will be removed to-morrow to have it regilded perhaps, but I shall order it put back."

Ludlow sat up and stretched out her foot for the slipper. "You make me sound like a common woman. I forgive you, but I don't have to listen. Now I am going to ring for Bertha."

"Look at me!" Unwillingly the girl's eyes turned to her aunt's. "What happened to Aubrey McAlister?" The delicate color was washed from Ludlow's face, leaving it strained, almost frightened.

"You know." Her voice was sibilant. "He was killed in the war."

"He was. After having sent you that letter which somehow got past the censor, saying that you had made a wreck out of his life, that without you he could not go on, and that for him there would be no returning from the morning attack."

"You read that!"

"You should not leave your mail lying carelessly around. Yes, I descended that far."

"But dear, I couldn't help it if Aubrey was neurotic."

"You made him so. A high-strung, fine boy—he went off with your kisses hot on his mouth—you may accuse me of vulgarity—and before six months you had written him that it was all over, when his need for you was bitterest. His letter was explicit. Did Nicholas Schuyler have anything to do with that?"

"You are wandering to-night, Aunt Anna, bringing in all these names. You know very well that Nick Schuyler married some one else. What has he got to do with it?"

"Yes. A woman on the stage. In the divorce proceedings he testified he was intoxicated, and every man, at least, knew she was not a woman you marry."

"Well?"

"Everybody thought he was engaged to you. He was mad about you. At five o'clock he was with you and at eleven he had married this creature. I would like to know what you said to him at five."

Ludlow stood up; she affected to stifle a yawn. "Nothing that would interest you or that you will ever know," she said

deliberately. "I don't see what it all has to do with Tony."

"Ludlow," said Miss Pendleton, "I do not blame you too much, and although you may not believe it I am fond of you. The same blood runs in our veins. My dear, it is good blood, but it is bad blood, too. We Pendleton women are incapable of caring for men. That is all right if we could leave them alone, but we cannot. There is something about us that makes us experiment, dissect, torture, to see what the results will be and the results are often horrible.

"Consider your own mother. She was killed at night on the tracks at Crossways, driving with another man. That was hushed up, but it killed your father. Look at your grandmother; at the time the Fontana affair rocked New York, but I will not bore you with family history—you know it well enough. That trait appears to-day—in Elenore, who studies the reactions of other people at a distance because she is too homely or too indifferent to attempt to rouse them herself, and in you, where it is carried to a greater degree and combined with complete selfishness. I know nothing of Maude Lawrence—she lives in Paris, but I can believe the worst."

The fire fell in a shower of sparks and the girl began to rearrange the charred wood, poking it idly. "I don't believe in heredity of that sort," she said over her shoulder.

"When you have lived as long as I have and see the same traits recurring in succeeding generations you have to," her aunt said, and put her hand across her eyes as though to shut out pictures.

Ludlow was curious. The same emotion that a vivisector about to perform a delicate operation might have rose in her. She had been angry, but anger seldom remained with her long. She wished, however, that she could see her great-aunt's face. "Is that why you never married, dear?" The voice was soft, quite casual. "Because you were afraid of heredity?"

The old woman did not answer, although she had heard. She was remembering her own experience so many years ago. Fifty or sixty. Surely sixty. There had been a man then. Thank God his name was forgotten by all but herself. He was black-haired, lusty, something like this Thorne boy, but less restrained. His black, hot eyes had intrigued her. Delicately, curiously she had aroused him, a sigh here, a glance there, a wordless promise in her smile, seeking to force the declaration that was slow to come for he was not of her class and knew it.

The memory of it was shameful now. On the slight pretext of a waxed floor she had slipped, permitting him to catch her in his arms, her head strained against his breast for a moment. Then he had believed a miracle had happened and had offered her his love. Her scorching, amused words still rang in her ears on quiet nights. She had pierced him a thousand times with a tiny rapier which had left its poison, for now that she had experimented she was furious at his insolence.

Then she had laughed—clear, cool. But instead of the expected humility he had gone mad—mad with passion and blind with hate. His arms were about her forcing her, crushing her down, his furious lips against hers, confident that her terrible pride would not permit her to cry out and indifferent if she did. He had flung her aside at last, a soiled thing, her hands clasped over her face as she crouched motionless.

"You're not as decent as the women of the streets for they offer something, but I have taken it!" He was gone. Sixty years in which to forget.

"Was it because you were afraid of heredity that you never married, Aunt Anna?"

Miss Pendleton's voice was a wraith of sound. "No, my dear, not that. Another reason." She gathered strength. "Ludlow, I am not trying to keep you from marriage; that would be wrong and we all must take what life offers us even at the price of unhappiness for ourselves or others. But you are not going to marry this boy. You know it. You are playing with him. There are other men more suitable, in your class, who would make you happier and stand less chance of being hurt. Young Thorne is charming, an agreeable com-

panion, I have no doubt, but he is beneath you.

"What he told us to-night of his people and his surroundings show that. You have my own pride of race. In these strange days of democratic tendencies family may be lost sight of, but it was not an accident that we were given a great position and we have in consequence a duty to it. Part of that duty is to keep our heritage pure. Even I can remember the lessons in my history and I know that when any aristocracy admits a lesser strain it is doomed. You can lower yourself, but you cannot raise another. For the moment the world seems to have lost sight of this, but it is true. Now, since I have always taught you this and you believe it for yourself, I ask you not to play with this boy. You have nothing to offer him."

The girl did not answer. What her aunt said might be true, but she was thinking, "If I telephone him to-morrow—"

"Ludlow." There was an exhausted note, almost of entreaty in Miss Pendleton's voice. "You will obey me in this for I am still stronger than you are and you know it. But I am growing tired. Each day I am a little more tired—" Her old mind drifted away from what she was saying for a moment. "So now I will make a bargain with you. You will keep your word although you are not above bargaining. I will give you the emeralds if you will not see this boy again. The chain, the ring and the three unset stones; and you may take them to Gattle's and have them reset."

A last flare of firelight swept over the girl's face as she stood head bent forward, a dreamy expression in her eyes as if she were listening to beautiful music. The emeralds—gorgeous, flawless, an incredible green. The fire died, leaving her face cold; her aunt, shrewdly watching, imagined a flicker of amusement passed over it.

The emeralds—bits of shiny green stone, no warmth, no feeling, no emotion. Then she crossed swiftly and placed her hand on the thin shoulders. "Would it hurt you very much, dear, if I married Tony?"

"At my age one is not hurt, but it would be impossible for you both."

"I don't want the emeralds, dear. Young girls of breeding do not wear them and—you promised—they will be mine eventually."

"Ring for my maid," said Miss Pendleton. "I am going to bed."

CHAPTER XIII.

LUDLOW'S NEW SENSATION.

THE Club Montparnasse was a very gay place. It partook of an earthly rather than a celestial character, but the little gods and goddesses who danced there found it heavenly indeed. It was one of the dancing clubs which with luck might be expected to reign in the hearts of its devotees for six months or even a year when its proprietors, temporarily wealthy, would close its doors to open elsewhere under another name.

The success it attained was strictly due to its exclusiveness and for that one paid. Admission was by card only and the management required that a prospective patron be vouched for by another. It was a rule often broken, but the exceptions were always flattering to the newcomer who felt that a distinct cachet of superiority had been conferred on him.

"You do not know any of the members? Well, in your case, sir—" It was almost like a patent of nobility.

An elevator, its mundane iron cage hung with green and white striped silk, like a tent, conveyed one to the third floor of the building where the club was situated in an unostentatious side street but near enough to the theaters of Broadway. There in a dimly lighted lobby coats and hats were left with maids and check-boys and one turned to the dancing room.

A crimson cord of plush velvet stretched across it and behind it stood a head waiter, bland but inexorable, whose duty it was to admit the elect. He had been hired solely for his phenomenal memory for names and his ability to recall faces. A smile from him was worth five dollars slipped into a discreet hand and he was aware of it. It illumined his face only when he was absolutely sure. Ring-side tables, as it were, cost twenty dollars, which included

neither a *couvert* charge nor supper; but they were close to the dancing floor and very desirable. The walls were covered with glowing silks, the ceiling was a dark blue vault studded with tiny electric stars, far away like the night, which gave an illusion of freshness that the vitiated air denied.

At intervals the dancing space was cleared and six beautiful half nude girls with straw mats belted about them, under the leadership of a superb creature, postured and flung themselves back and forth in the contortions of a native dance. It was the height of the South Sea craze. The orchestra was undoubtedly the best in New York; the leader commanded the salary of a bank president and to its sensuous music patrons danced shoulder touching shoulder, forgetful of the expensive food growing cold on the tables. The Club Montparnasse was very gay.

Anthony was fascinated by it. He had been in such places often enough before, but to-night it fitted in with his mood. The color, the subdued clamor, the varied scents made him a little dizzy, not unpleasantly so, but like the first escape into anæsthesia. Escape. That was the word. He had been vaguely seeking for it in the back of his mind all evening. Here he might find it. Into another world.

The abandon of the dancers, the syncopation of the music, the unrestrained extravagance, the bewildering flight of colored lights that from some secret place swept the room were filling him with forgetfulness, driving him farther and farther from the humdrum problems of his daily world. Living was becoming a phantasy where nothing mattered, nothing was important. He stared intently at the golden beads rising in his champagne to burst in an infinitesmal spatter of foam on the surface. They were like tiny souls imprisoned, his own, Ludlow's, every one's, struggling upward to burst into freedom and nothingness. How pleasant!

Amused by his simile, he tried to explain it to Ludlow, who slowly withdrew her eyes from the tall man talking to the over-eager woman at another table. "I don't understand you, Tony," she said. "We're not imprisoned, are we? It seems rather absurd to want to burst—like that, into nothing."

A passing irritation filled him. Why couldn't Ludlow understand? It was so simple. But perhaps it was his fault; he was a little intoxicated, no, not that—dizzy, and had not explained adequately. If only the music would play again. When she was in his arms it was easier. What foolishness was this—easier? He was so supremely happy. Suddenly he swept the problem from him.

"Here's to you, dearest! Our first toast since we were engaged!" There they were gone—all the little imprisoned souls! He set the glass back on the table and smiled unsteadily at her. The music began to play. There was a scraping of chairs. He was holding her again. She had not understood, but that did not matter. Her eyes were lovely. Violet or gray? She had closed them, swaying to the passionate rhythm. Against his black coat the texture of her skin was finer than white petals. He was strangling in the gold of her hair.

"Open your eyes," he whispered, "and look at me."

It had happened ten days ago, Anthony could not have told how. The sequence of events leading up to his proposal had been so bewildering, so rapid that now they blurred in his mind, a confusing maze. There had been dinner somewhere—Ludlow was strangely silent. Later he had suggested a theater, dancing, a movie; she had refused, her lips curving down wistfully, watching him always with veiled glances.

The idea of a ride, however, amused her. They might hire a taxi—weren't they cheaper by the hour? Anthony had loved her for this—and go through the park, then up and along Riverside Drive. There were ships on the river and the lights would be pretty. It was so hot during August in New York. She felt fagged.

Ludlow was struggling with herself. "Oh, Lord, what would he do? I'm so bored. Just—just to see—" Three months had passed, nearly four, since her great-aunt had talked to her after dinner. And she had made no promise. She really was devoted to Tony, and she might care. Who would be hurt? She felt pathetic, ill-used, very

much alone. New York was deserted and very hot. She felt listless.

"If I've got to stay in town with that bedridden old woman I have to have some attention," she thought. Anthony's hair was so crisp and black—she loved him when that queer light came into his eyes. And this time she might really care.

It was cooler along the Drive and Anthony lay back, his eyes closed, the fresh breeze from the river sweeping his face. It relaxed him, but he felt more tired, too. Lately he had not been sleeping, a restlessness had been on him that kept him by the open window until the stars began to pale. Sometimes he was torn with unsatisfied desire; it plucked at his nerves and made his dreams fantastic when he drowsed at last, his head on the window ledge. Faces drifted past him—Ludlow's and Judith's. He could never tell which, they were both so fair.

"What are you thinking of?" Ludlow had asked him.

"I've been in New York over a year. So little accomplished, so little done." He sighed.

The girl slipped her hand in his. "Oh, my dear, I know, but I have such great hopes for you." Her voice was rich with sympathy.

The car swayed, and she was pressed against him, closer, then the flood gates broke and she was in his arms.

"I love you! I love you! I love you!" He kept repeating the words, straining her to him, his mouth seeking hers like a starving man.

"Yes, yes," she whispered in return, quelling the doubt in her mind. "Just for a little while," she thought. "I'm almost happy for once."

It had been a new Tony, and the experience had justified itself. He had been thoughtful and a little dazed next day, more quiet than thoughtful, but Ludlow found in this a mark of her power over him. He was overawed naturally by her surrender. His quiet was tinged with respect, but this was proper, too; she was conscious of the very great gift she was bestowing on him. It pleased her even more than his ardor, and it was only for a time.

Later, she would release him—she called it that to herself—if she found that her passion for him was to be short-lived. He would not be hurt, she argued, that is, more hurt than he would be anyway; for since he undoubtedly loved her what could it matter to him whether they were engaged or whether they were never engaged since there could be no fulfillment. In either case the damage had been done if damage it were, and she quoted glibly to herself, "It's better to have loved and lost," forgetting easily Aubrey McAlister and the Schuyler boy who had married an actress.

She had made their engagement contingent on one condition: It should be kept a secret. She was really afraid of her great-aunt, who, old and helpless as she was, sometimes dominated the girl. It was a stronger strain, an indomitable spark kept alive in the fading body only by the power of will, but it usually brought Ludlow to terms. The girl assigned another reason for it: Miss Pendleton was so old she could be unconventional with impunity; she had absolutely no scruples as to what she did or said, and she was perfectly capable of telling Anthony or any one else for that matter the story of McAlister.

Ludlow shuddered at the results—there had been odd enough stories told about his death as it was—returning soldiers had hinted that he had been either animated with divine courage or had gone mad, and one ugly rumor had it that next day when his body was gathered up by the advance far ahead of other men that his tunic had been smeared with powder stains although strangely there had been no enemy near enough to make this possible. She gave Anthony another reason for their secrecy:

"I'm afraid of the shock to Aunt Anna, dear. She is so very frail. Anything like this might be fatal. If you cared for her as I do you would know how I dread anything happening to her. It is inevitable some time, but I want to postpone it. She brought me up, you know. Really my mother."

He had agreed readily enough. They couldn't be married for a long time anyway. He did not have enough money. Better not to say anything. In fact he was sufficiently bewildered not to want to discuss it. He was the happiest of men, or he ought to be,

but there was some flaw. His feeling that Ludlow was to give herself to him was triumphant rather than humble. The realization that he, a crude boy, who had been in New York for only a year had won a girl who for her beauty and position must be desired by many other men only added to his feeling of triumph. He was conscious that it was not exactly the emotion he expected to have, and it seemed not quite fine, but he was willing to accept it hoping that a deeper emotion would come later. After all his instinct might be at fault and his experience had been too limited to confirm instinct.

His suggestion that lack of money would postpone their marriage for a long time had roused a feeling of opposition in the girl that for the moment convinced her she loved him.

" Tony, dear, we needn't think of that. I have plenty for both—more than enough —not nearly so much as Elenore because a good deal of mine was left in trust for me and Aunt Anna gets the income until her death. We won't have to worry though. Later I'll have more from Aunt Anna of course. She has a great deal. Elenore will get some, and Maude Lawrence, and charity, too, but the bulk of it comes to me. I have always lived with her."

" My wife may have a million, but she'll never support me," he assured her somewhat stiffly.

Ludlow's eyes filled with tears. " Do you think that is quite kind? Just because I have it and you haven't. What difference does it make? I'd take from you, and whatever I have is yours." Money meant nothing to her since she always had it; she was extraordinarily generous.

Anthony had taken her into his arms, conscious of the greatness of her love. " We needn't think about it for a while, dear. There is a difference, though, really there is. Any man would agree with me."

All this had happened out of town. An invitation fortuitously arriving, had taken them for a week to the Berkshires and Anthony had been glad to go. He was tired. The office made no objection to his leaving; some time was due him anyway. Ludlow had arranged the trip by means of a midnight telephone message, but of this Anthony knew nothing. He was pleased at the thought that the George Casimirs, whom he hardly knew, should want him to fill in at the last moment, and he was particularly happy since Ludlow was going anyway. The country would be pleasant, he might try his hand at golf; the stables were good. Did he ride? No one would bother them and in the quiet and peace away from the turmoil of the city they would become adjusted to their new relationship. Now the week had gone and they were back. Anthony was still seeking readjustment, finding analogy between himself and the bubbles in champagne that rose and burst into nothing.

The music had stopped at last. There was another roar of applause, insatiable women adding the sharp patter of their hands to the booming claps of their partners. The orchestra leader stood forward on the dais, bowing with deprecating firmness. " There's no more. Let's sit down." As quickly as they had risen the patrons were again hurrying to their tables and the cooling food.

Anthony and Ludlow forced their way through the crowd toward the table they had reserved in the back of the room. He had caught the girl by an elbow, but less to guide her than to support himself. He was still dizzy, almost as if he were ill. It couldn't be the champagne, he had not taken much. Maybe he was hungry. They would order food and that would take away this frightened nausea that contracted the pit of his stomach. Again his thoughts startled him. Frightened nausea! It was ridiculous—didn't make sense. What was he frightened about? He closed his eyes. The crush about them was very great. Some one was blocking his path, some one who did not move. Ludlow had slipped from him and was gone. Immediately he opened his eyes and looked down into the face of Judith Gray!

It was imagination, of course. She stood before him, swaying slightly, her lips parted as if she were about to speak, a half smile of pleased welcome on her face. He stared stupidly without a sign of recognition, then his heart beat so wildly that he gasped.

Another surge forced him on and they were separated. But he had touched her gown. It was real.

When he rejoined Ludlow at the table his face was so ghastly that she exclaimed at it. Anthony did not answer her. His glass was empty and he signaled urgently to a waiter to refill it. Then he drank the wine at a gulp and sat down. The sharp sting of it brought the color slowly back into his cheeks and his eyes, which had dilated enormously, became almost normal. Ludlow commented on his appearance:

"For a man who has just had a week in the country you look awfully sallow. I never saw you look so queer, Tony. Muddy. Do you feel sick?" There was a delicate distaste in her voice; she disliked illness and never was herself in spite of her apparent fragility.

"Nothing," he answered. "It is nothing. I have seen some people I know. I must speak to them. May I leave you?" There was an urgent note in his voice, but he had gone without waiting for an answer. Ludlow stared after him curiously.

On the opposite side of the dance floor he found Judith. She was with Luke Jackson, but he was not immediately aware of him. The girl was wearing an evening gown of dark blue crepe de chine which looked simple by comparison with the dresses of the women about her, but he did not notice that either. He saw her face with its wide eyes, her fresh fair skin, her mouth opening in a smile of welcome. She looked extraordinarily healthy. Immediately two women at the next table became metallic, too brilliant with their scarlet lips, their tinged cheeks, the darkened eyes. Then he noticed that she had a bunch of flowers at her waist. Sweet peas. That absurd Slaterville custom. His thoughts flashed back to Slaterville. All this while the smile had widened until it creased into a dimple in her cheek.

"Why, Tony!" she exclaimed. "To find you here. What luck! The world's a small place after all." She laughed at the bromide, happily excited.

"I didn't know you were here. I didn't know you were coming," he answered dully.

"But I wrote you—to your office. And to Luke, too. Why don't you speak to Luke? Don't tell me you don't know each other."

"I used to know Thorne before he got too rich for my blood," Luke commented.

"I haven't been to my office for a week. I'm sorry—" Anthony automatically offered his hand to the other man who shook it limply.

Luke was red-faced, shiny with soap and water, and looked prosperous in his ready-made dinner suit, which was braided and fitted too snugly. Modest diamond shirt studs proclaimed their elegance and, by their smallness, conservatism. The shirt itself was pleated in tiny pleats. Anthony noticed that his hair was obviously plastered down with unguents.

"It's amazing to find you in town. I didn't know you were coming. Tell me about it." He turned back to Judith more composed now.

"Tony, you haven't written to me for so long I had to come to see whether you were behaving yourself." She smiled up at him. "That's half the truth. The other half—" her smiled faded—"Slaterville got me the same way it did you. Only it took me longer to find out. I had to escape at last. Now I'm going to take some courses at Barnard. Later—" she shrugged—"something will turn up. Anyway I can never go back. Two days in your city have showed me that. I know now why you men never return." She glanced at Luke to include him in their talk.

"You're going to stay. What about your people?" Anthony's voice sounded curiously flat, but he could not have told if he had whispered or shouted. There was a steady drumming in his ears; he had to strain to hear her answer.

"Mother and father?" She clenched her hands and struck them softly together. It was her own gesture. He remembered it with a pang which seemed to be no part of him. "You may imagine! Tears, deserting daughter, dens of iniquity. But I won out. I always do. They love me too much." She smiled reminiscently. "But sit down, Tony. Luke, make that waiter bring a chair."

Anthony recollected himself. "I can't. There's some one with me. I must go."

Luke had noticed the girl sitting alone at the table. "Bring her over," he exclaimed hospitably. "She's a peach. I must say, Tony, you've got the taste. But I've traveled a bit in the last year myself. I know now that—you know—" he winked broadly—"isn't quite up to snuff. I've lost that crowd. Ask her over and we'll have a party."

A sick feeling of humiliation swept over Anthony. He glanced at Luke. No, it was impossible. "I'm sorry, I can't," he said hurriedly, turning scarlet and feeling that in some way he was betraying the heritage of which he was proud. "We're just going."

"Oh," said Judith inaudibly, and felt the color creeping up into her own face. Suddenly she felt ashamed.

"I must have your address. I want to see you at once. When there's more time." He took a pencil from his pocket and scribbled on the back of a menu the numbers she gave him. Then he turned and left them without a word, walking blindly through the South Sea dancers who were beginning to perform.

He had been going to order food, but now he was no longer hungry or thirsty. Ludlow watched him intently, waiting for the explanation that did not come.

"Who was that queer looking girl you were talking to?" she asked at last.

"Queer!" His eyes blazed at her so suddenly that she shrank back before the menace in them. "She isn't queer looking! An old friend of mine from Slaterville. Judith Gray."

"Oh," said Ludlow inaudibly like Judith, and felt a new sensation. Jealousy.

It remained with her while they were preparing to leave the restaurant and it grew in the taxi on the way home. She had made an opportunity to observe Judith again in that way women have when they are apparently unconscious of doing it, and she had been obliged to reverse her judgment. There was nothing queer looking about her. Her clothes, yes; and she was far from being the flawless beauty that Ludlow herself was, but she was a very pretty girl, noticeably so even in that room where actresses, women of fashion with limitless pocketbooks and women dependent on their beauty vied with one another in a dazzling array.

A generous face. Wide eyes, humor about the mouth, steadfastness, frankness—Ludlow was honest with herself in assaying other women—and probably very dangerous. She tried to make Anthony talk about her, but he was evasive, which pricked her further; then when under her casual but insistent questions he began every word he uttered seemed to implicate him. He was taciturn, then enthusiastic; where he had refused to talk before he now told too much. It was all unimportant—slight reminiscences of their childhood, gossip, local doings, but it convinced Ludlow that the girl had meant something to him. She lay back in the car, watching him, her face placid, not too much interested in this unfolding of his past life, but inwardly she was calling herself a fool for having imagined his life had begun the day she met him. Elenore Laidlaw would not have been so stupid.

This unexpected flame of jealousy was mounting higher—except for curiosity she had never experienced so vital an emotion and it scorched her. That he should have cared for anybody before was conceivable, but having known her and there being an engagement between them, even though it meant nothing to her, it was like an affront to her beauty to have him disturbed by a face from the past. Anthony instantly became more desirable.

It was late when they reached the house, but she persuaded him to come in. They sat in the darkened library where a few candles still guttered in the corners. The man stood before the empty fireplace, very straight and slim, not speaking. Ludlow on the couch was able to observe him point by point almost as if she were examining an animal for sale. His flat stomach, the narrow hips, the nervous hands with their sensitive fingers that even now were clenching and unclenching in his coat pockets—his head, the best part of him, beautifully shaped, bent forward in that attitude of alert listening that was characteristic of him. It was too dark to see his eyes and she wondered if they were glowing or somber. Yes, he was desirable. A perfect foil to her blondness, and he would go far.

Even the Western accent that had annoyed her was wearing off.

Deliberately she reached up and began drawing the pins from her hair which fell and floated about her shoulders, clouding her eyes, hiding the oval of her face.

"My head aches a little." The intimacy of it caught at his breath. Immediately vaguely fantastic visions he had had became very real and involuntarily he crossed over and sat beside her. She smiled mistily up at him and put a strand of her hair in his hand. "It's fine, isn't it? I'll never have it bobbed."

"It's beautiful," he declared huskily, and kissed it.

"Tony, dear." Her hand was stroking his arm. "How long must we wait before we are married? I don't want to wait long. Life is too short to be without you. These empty days are just a waste for me."

"As soon as—as soon as I can afford it." There was something the matter with his throat.

"But dear, that may be a long time. Can't you gamble on your future a little for me? You know you will win eventually. But now—Aunt Anna could not go through a big wedding. Tony, if something should happen—I need you now."

All the room was black, a curtain had shut out everything but the girl, the couch, her loose hair. Pulses were beating at Anthony's temples and his wrists. It was a brilliant match—his future would be made easy, but he had forgotten that. He had forgotten the Club Montparnasse and Judith, too.

"You mean a secret wedding? Just a justice of the peace? Soon?" He was whispering the words.

"Yes, for you. To-morrow—"

An impulse to sanity struggled for a moment and died. "Can we be ready so soon?"

"Can we wait so long?" Her arms were about his neck; she was drawing him down beside her.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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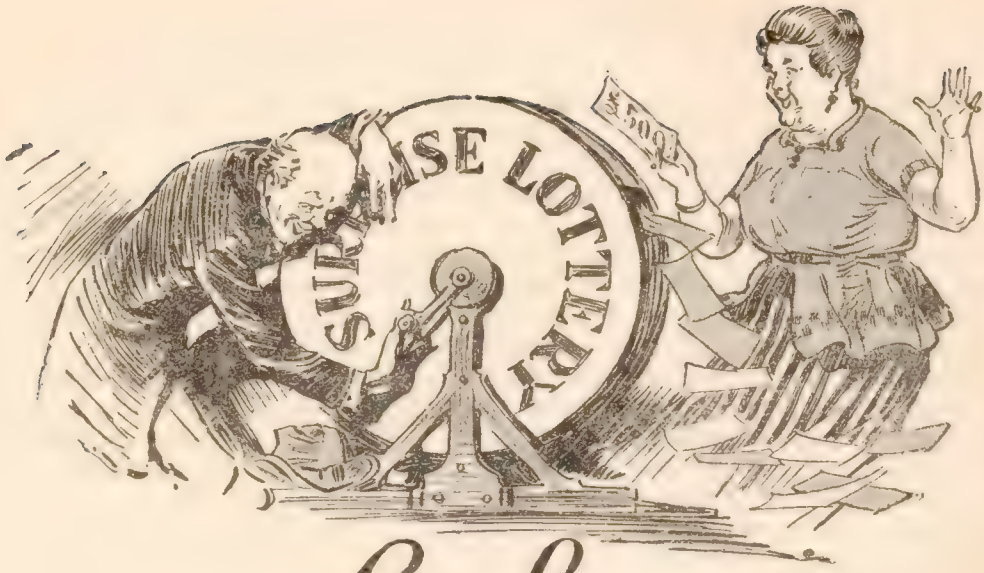
THE WILD STALLION

AFAR upon the ragged mountain crest,
He stands alone, a mighty sentinel;
His fiery eyes and quivering sinews tell
Of grim faced men and mettled steeds hard pressed,
As if they rode on a determined quest.
One short, defiant snort breaks on the air;
The noble head is raised and nostrils flare;
And then, a faint dust floats out from the west.

The creaking saddles and the choking sand,
The heaving, steaming, sweat-soaked, weary steeds,
The muttered curses of discouraged men,
Proclaim in mockery a scheme out-planned;
For, far away, the wild horse swiftly speeds
Down lonely wastes and hills beyond their ken.

H. W. Munson.



Lucky Arrangements

By F. MORTON HOWARD

MR. GEORGE HENRY CHEDWORTH, after four days of placid, care-free sojourn at the seaside, was contentfully returning to his home and family.

He had had what he considered a thoroughly full and enjoyable time. He had sauntered along cliff paths. He had sat on breakwaters and absorbedly cast pebble after pebble into the sea. He had braced himself against the strong breezes that assailed the pierhead and had carefully and conscientiously inhaled ozone. He had browsed among the glass cases in the local museum, and had gravely inspected most of the scenic and antiquarian attractions of the district. Also, once, when no one was looking, he had tested the strength of his punch on an automatic machine designed for that purpose, though the result did not encourage him to repeat the experiment.

Insipid and guileless must his behavior have appeared to the casual observer. How was a stranger to know that the mere reading of a newspaper in the blowy publicity of a bench on the promenade was a proceeding that had the thrill of unaccustomed adventure for Mr. Chedworth? And, as for Mr. Chedworth's guilelessness, how, after beholding the meek, mild personality of the little man, could a stranger ever guess that Mrs. Chedworth believed her husband to be roaming the Midlands in assiduous commercial travel?"

Yet, though indeed he was thus deceiving his wife, Mr. Chedworth entertained no qualms of shame for his duplicity. On the contrary, when he thought of his deluded spouse and children, it was usually with admiration for his own ingenuity in stabilizing an extraordinary situation. By suppressions and evasions and even by downright falsehoods he had rendered ten-

able a position that honesty would inevitably have filled with discomforts.

A few weeks ago he would have been aghast at the idea of concealing the existence of an odd ten shillings from Mrs. Chedworth. Now he had come quite equably to contemplate his concealment from her of his unexpected legacy of over three thousand pounds. He found that his falsity troubled him less and less every time that he examined it.

"She's getting all she wants, anyway," he would reflect. "Getting far more to spend nowadays than ever she expected, I'll be bound. And *I'm* getting a bit of peace and quiet. Able to steady up and enjoy myself and take things easy after all those years. Best all round, the way I'm managing it. And I ain't spending such a lot on myself, either. It's piling up and piling up in the bank, for the children one day. No, I ain't a bit sorry I took the line I did. Ought to be, I suppose, but I ain't! I expect my nerves are stronger, or something."

And in this latter surmise Mr. Chedworth was correct, for financial ease and the respite from the stress of long years of ill-paid toil were beginning to have their effect on him. Leisure and simple pleasures and good, regular food were combining to tone up his constitution. Although he was but vaguely aware of it, an unaccustomed vigor of mentality was gradually infusing his thoughts and actions, and the habit of securing what he might desire, conferred on him by the power of his purse, had begun to develop in him a certain briskness and alertness which suggested that, one day, real decisiveness might be disclosed as one of the components of his character.

It was with a light heart that Mr. Chedworth was voluntarily surrendering himself once more to domesticity. He had no objection to family life in homeopathic doses, and was supported by the knowledge that, after a few days of the stress and strain of his discordant household, he would again be journeying off to solitary quietude and ease.

"Hullo, pa!" young Norman greeted him at the corner of the avenue.

"Hullo, my boy!" exclaimed Mr. Chedworth, looking pleased. "Come to meet me, eh?"

"No," replied Norman honestly. "I was just coming this way, that's all!"

There was a little pause. Then Norman, suspecting an intention to humiliate him with a parental kiss in full view of sightseers, tactically seized his father's suit case and struggled off with it.

"Everybody quite well?" inquired Mr. Chedworth.

"Yes. I cut me thumb yesterday. Helping ma pack, I was. And then young Kathleen came fooling about and pushed me. It was that big pink gas-globe, the one that used to be in the passage. Ma *was* cross. She said it would cost three and six to get a new one, and she said she didn't know where the money was coming from."

"We'll have to see what we can do," said Mr. Chedworth.

He meditated a while on the straits which always overtook his wife's finances, no matter how adequately she were supplied. But a short while ago he would have been seriously concerned by the need for a new gas-globe for the passage. The purchase of it would have presented a problem in economy. It would have meant an additional pinching and screwing. The whole domestic budget for the ensuing week would have had to be scrutinized and overhauled and readjusted to provide for the provision of a new gas-globe.

Even now Mr. Chedworth could not get his perspectives quite right. A broken gas-globe was still a minor tragedy to him, and it imposed on him a temporary gravity that was a legacy of the old life of worried penury.

"Ought to have been more careful, my son," he admonished the boy.

"I was helping ma. She said she'd forgive me this once," returned Norman, as though that statement lifted the whole matter above Mr. Chedworth's interference. "Helping her pack things ready for the move, I was."

"Oh, yes, the move," said Mr. Chedworth.

Queer how his interests had become di-

verted to things that didn't matter. A year ago a move of residence would have loomed over him as a huge and rather terrifying event. And now he'd just been mooning about at the seaside, doing nothing, and had almost forgotten that Mrs. Chedworth was in the throes of preparing for the transfer. Had he still been a harassed little clerk, he would have been slaving in his shirt sleeves till midnight all this week, furbishing and patching furniture against its exposure to the critical gaze of two sets of neighbors in the broad daylight of the pavement. He was well out of that!

"Ma's down at the Larches now," proffered Norman. "Her and Gladys. There's floors to be stained. They've left that for you for to-morrow."

"Oh, have they?" said Mr. Chedworth a little flatly.

"There isn't half a lot of floors to be done," mentioned Norman, not without hint of malicious glee. "The Larches is so much bigger than Atherleigh, and the carpets ain't near large enough for the rooms, and there ain't enough to go round, either. Ma said she was going to see if she couldn't get new ones out of you some day."

"We'll see," observed Mr. Chedworth.

He felt rather baffled about those floors that awaited staining. He had had so much leisure that a little easy work with a brush and a tin of varnish almost appealed to him as a change. But the notion of spending all to-morrow in going over floor after floor with cans of staining medium did not attract him in the least. He had stained all the floors at Atherleigh once, and he had thoroughly loathed the job before he was halfway through with it. The floors had seemed to get bigger and bigger each time he started on a fresh one, and he had got himself in no end of a mess, and he had come to hate the very smell of the stuff. Like coffins, it was. And even then the floors hadn't looked quite right when he had finished them. All mottled and streaky, they were. And his back and knees had ached and—

No, he certainly didn't want to pass the morrow in staining the floors at the Larches. He wouldn't have minded moving one or two of the rose trees from the garden at Atherleigh, but staining floors all day with sticky stuff that smelled like coffins! The very idea was made all the more exasperating by his secret knowledge that he was a man with an income of three thousand pounds a year. A fat lot of help all that money was to him when he had to go slopping stain all over floor boards!

"Here, you take my suit case and go on home with it," directed Mr. Chedworth. "I'll step along and see those floors. They mayn't want doing after all."

"Bet you they do!" retorted Norman.

"How do you know?" grumbled Mr. Chedworth.

"Ma said they wanted doing," replied the boy triumphantly.

II.

Mr. Chedworth, entering the Larches, stepped into the drawing-room and surveyed the expanse of its flooring with vast disfavor.

"Dashed if I do!" he whispered in rebellion.

From some remote room upstairs came the tones of his wife's voice. To Mr. Chedworth, who had not heard it since Monday, it sounded even more assertive than usual.

"Suppose I shall have to, though," he murmured ruefully.

Mrs. Chedworth and Gladys descended to the landing above. He waited below for them, listening.

"I almost begin to wish now that we hadn't moved!" Mrs. Chedworth was declaring. "What our shabby furniture in here will look like—"

"It *is* pretty old and worn," admitted Gladys.

"It 'll look disgraceful," prophesied her mother. "Of course it wasn't so bad in a poky, dark little place like Atherleigh, but big, light rooms like these are bound to show it up."

"Perhaps if we'd stayed at Atherleigh a bit longer," began Gladys.

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mrs. Chedworth sharply. "It's quite time we moved. Your pa's new position needs keeping up, doesn't it? Proper pride I've always had,

and proper pride I always will have. All the same," she ended, lapsing into a note of angry despair, "that furniture—"

"If only we could have a new carpet or two," sighed Gladys.

"We want everything new right through the house!" amplified her mother. "If only your pa was earning enough— But I shall begin to replace as soon as ever I can! He must manage it somehow. We've moved practically for his sake, and he must help us. And I'll get a rug or two for those stained floors out of him before he goes away on Monday, that I'm determined on!"

"Poor pa!" said Gladys, with a kind of lazy sympathy for her father.

"It's his duty!" asserted Mrs. Chedworth. "If he wants us to live up to our position—"

"Perhaps he's done well in extra commissions this week," hazarded Gladys hopefully.

"Let's hope so. He generally does now, I must say that for him. But if only he'd make more! Not niggardly little sum, you know, but quite a lot! We might be able to start refurnishing the home at once then."

"It would cost an awful lot," mentioned Gladys.

"I know! I know!" agreed Mrs. Chedworth with asperity. "That's just the hopelessness of it! Can't you see how Mrs. Blundell and Mrs. Marchison and Miss Deacon will sneer at seeing all the same old furniture in this lovely new house? They'll guess we can't afford new, of course!"

"Well, they'll be right," said Gladys candidly.

"Yes, I know, but—but—" fussed her mother fretfully. "Can't you see how humiliating it will be?"

"We shall be living in a more expensive house all the same," urged Gladys. "That 'll be a whack in the eye for them," she added with a relapse into her high-school diction. "And there'll be nice new stained floors for them to look at!

Mr. Chedworth frowned. Fancy the girl, after talking so sensibly, making a joke of a thing like that!

"Yes, your pa will have to do them very carefully," said Mrs. Chedworth. "He'll have to go all over them twice at least. He'll have to spend Sunday as well as to-morrow on them. Nobody need know."

"Oh, blow!" muttered Mr. Chedworth, and hurriedly coughed to cover the utterance of his words, and so revealed his presence to his wife and daughter.

They leaned over the banisters to look at him.

"So you've got back again, George," observed Mrs. Chedworth, and at once went on to ask: "Have you had a good week?"

The question flustered him. It seemed to have a sinister, inquisitional sound. His heart thumped for a moment or two. Was she hinting at anything? Had she learned of his seaside truancy? Then he glanced up at her and realized that her query had reference to his supposed business trip.

"Oh, pretty fair," he declared, relieved. "Not at all bad. Quite good, in fact."

"We shall want lots of new things for this house," she warned him.

He made no reply to that.

"Carpets," she instanced.

"Might be able to manage something," he said. "Oh, I dare say I can manage something about that," he added, on a more definite and reassuring note.

"We shall want at least three new ones—big ones," she stated.

"Well, of course, it's a pretty big order, that," he returned, feigning perplexity. "Still—"

"Do you really mean you could afford to let me have some new carpets now, at once, before we move?" she demanded in considerable excitement.

Mr. Chedworth affected to be indulging in mental arithmetic, though really he was congratulating himself on the easy way in which a distasteful prospect was dissolving itself. As in a vision he saw those vast expanses of floor boarding floating farther and farther away from him until they vanished altogether.

"Yes, I can just about manage it," he told Mrs. Chedworth. "You'll have to go slow for a bit after you've bought 'em, of course, but—"

"And yet I don't know," she interrupted.

"The furniture is all in such a bad state. We need new furniture more than we need new carpets."

"I don't know about new furniture—" he remarked dubiously.

It would never do to let her know that she could have just everything she wanted simply by asking for it! She'd wonder where all the money was coming from, and then she'd keep on cross-questioning him till she discovered his secret.

"I'm not asking for new furniture as well as new carpets," she said tartly. "I'm not so silly as to imagine for a moment that you can afford both."

He was glad to hear her say that, but his satisfaction was shortlived.

"I'll get some new furniture, and let the carpets go for a bit," she announced.

"Oh, but—"

"If you can let me have money for carpets, you can let me have money for furniture instead," she pointed out. "It doesn't make any difference to you. It's the *same* money, isn't it? And the carpets can wait. The floors will look quite nice for a time after you've stained them."

Instantly the floors resumed their hateful wide expanse in Mr. Chedworth's eyes.

"You can start on them after tea," said Mrs. Chedworth. "It's light till quite late now. Norman can run round before tea and get you a tin of the stain, to be going on with."

Mr. Chedworth's inimical gaze wandered toward the floor of the adjacent dining room. Already he fancied he could smell the abominable stuff, could feel the sticky cling of it on his fingers. To-night, all to-morrow, all Sunday!

He caught his breath sharply at an idea.

"Afraid I can't manage to-night," he demurred. "If you want that money, I shall have to go along to the office and see how I can arrange it. If I get away at once, the office might still be open."

She accepted the explanation.

"Well, you must start the staining early to-morrow, that's all," she directed. "You'd better go along to the office now. Me and Gladys could go choosing some furniture to-morrow, if you can get the money to-day."

He hastened off. At first he was elated at postponing contact with the staining fluid, but soon he realized that he had merely secured a reprieve and not an acquittal.

"How the deuce am I going to dodge the job?" he pondered querulously, as he retraced his way to the station. "How am I going to get her to buy carpets instead of furniture? Blessed if I can see! Suppose I told her she could have furniture and carpets as well, she'd smell a rat pretty quick! What the dickens can I do? Fancy, messing about staining floors all the week-end, and me with my income, too! But what *can* I do, without giving the show away?"

He stood uncertainly before the ticket office.

"I'll go and see young Carford about it," he decided at length. "He might think of something."

III.

"HULLO!" said Brian Carford, in surprise, as Mr. Chedworth entered the room. "Thought you were going home to-night for the week-end."

"I was—I am," replied Mr. Chedworth, a little testily. "I—I got to stain a lot of floors!"

Carford grinned unsympathetically.

"I hate staining floors!" declared Mr. Chedworth quite passionately.

"Well, then, don't do 'em," recommended Carford. "Send a wire home saying you've been called away on important business. You've got your own room here, you know. Nothing to prevent you putting in the week-end here, is there?"

Mr. Chedworth examined the suggestion. It had its allurements. The apartment he rented from the Carfords would be a very pleasant refuge from that floor-staining prospect. And he had never spent a Sunday in the heart of London. But—

He shook his head regretfully.

"Those blessed floors will be waiting for me till I do get back," he foretold.

"Can't you sprain your shoulder, or something like that?"

"I might," conceded Mr. Chedworth, though not at all hopefully. Then he re-

turned to complete pessimism. "No, she'll only let the floors wait till I get better."

"Well, couldn't you stand her some carpets?" put forward Carford. "You could do that, couldn't you?"

"That's just what I *can't* do!" exclaimed Mr. Chedworth. "I'm—I'm simply longing to stand her carpets! She can have all the carpets she wants!"

"Well, then?" asked Carford, puzzled.

"She's set on buying new furniture. She says she'll wait for the carpets. Says that the floors will look nice enough for the present when they're stained. That's where she's got me cornered."

"Well, then, why not give her new furniture and new carpets as well?" demanded Carford, looking pleased with himself for his ingenuity.

Mr. Chedworth gestured impatiently.

"I've thought of that already," he said.

"Well, it's a sound scheme," claimed Carford.

"If you can tell me a way by which I can shower carpets and furniture on my wife without raising her suspicions," sneered Mr. Chedworth, "I'll be much obliged! *And* surprised!"

Carford meditated a while.

"Sorry," he apologized. "It's a rotten idea! I can see that now."

"I'm only too anxious to let her have a houseful of new furniture and a stack of new carpets, too," asserted Mr. Chedworth. "I've been thinking all about it in the train, coming along. Why shouldn't she have what she wants, far as possible? I don't want to behave mean with her. I got to be cautious, so she doesn't guess the truth, of course, but I don't want to be mean. I want her to have as good a time as I'm having, in our different ways, if you follow me?"

"Oh, I quite understand. In fact," suggested Carford in playful malice, "the more you can spend on her, without raising her suspicions, the less guilty you feel yourself, eh?"

"That's about the size of it," admitted Mr. Chedworth. "She's getting far more fun out of the money, the way I'm working it, than she would if she knew all about it. You ought to have seen her at the idea of that bit of new furniture. Regular keen and excited. But if she was to get used to lots of money—see my meaning?"

Carford nodded.

"If she wants to show off to the neighbors, I'm willing to help her, far as it's safe," declared Mr. Chedworth. "If I could think of a way to furnish that new house for her, I'd do it like a shot. 'Specially if I could dodge that floor staining. But how I'm to let her have enough money to pay for the whole affair, I can't see."

"It's a bit of a teaser," agreed Carford.

He leaned back in his chair, his fingers intertwined behind his head and his eyes closed in thought. Mr. Chedworth watched him anxiously.

"Jove, I've got it!" cried Carford suddenly. "You'll have to have a slice of luck, that's all!"

"What do you mean?"

"Your wife is going to have her new furniture, and she's going to have new carpets as well! And she'll never suspect who they came from."

"That sounds all right," commented Mr. Chedworth eagerly. Then his face fell. "Here, none of that mysterious Father Christmas sort of business!" he stipulated. "No trying to pile a lot of stuff on her without telling her who sent it! She'd soon ferret out the truth of that."

"Well, she'll know that it's through you that she's got the furniture and things. She'll have to know that much. It can't be avoided. It's all part of the scheme."

"Then it isn't coming off!" announced Mr. Chedworth firmly. "It isn't even going to be tried! If I go giving her housefuls of furniture— Why, the cat would be out of the bag in no time!"

"She'll take 'em from you, she'll know that she's got you to thank for 'em, and yet she'll never suspect the truth," promised Carford. "Is that good enough for you? Now, look here, how much are you prepared to spring on the stuff?"

Mr. Chedworth sat thoughtful.

"I want to make sure there's enough to buy carpets as well as furniture," he pointed out.

"What about five hundred pounds?" suggested Carford.

"What?" cried Chedworth, all his old instincts of thrift reasserting themselves at such careless mention of so big a sum.

"Why not?" queried Carford.

"Come to think of it," admitted Mr. Chedworth, "why not? Only it—it sort of startled me at first, you know. Five or ten pounds here and five or ten pounds there don't seem so much. I've got used to *them* by now. But when you talk about five hundred pounds, all in a lump sum!"

"She'll be able practically to refurnish the whole house for that," pointed out Carford. "Why not give her a good time when you've got the chance? What do you say—will you go to five hundred pounds?"

"Right you are," acquiesced Mr. Chedworth.

"Got your check book on you?"

"It's in the desk in my room yonder."

"Well, if you'll fetch it and write out a check for five hundred—" prompted Carford.

Mr. Chedworth hesitated.

"Look here, don't you trust me?" asked Carford steadily. "Is that what you're jibbing at?"

Mr. Chedworth, without another word, procured his check book.

"Who am I to make this five hundred pounds payable to?" he wanted to know.

"Better leave that part blank," directed Carford. "I'll fill in the name myself. I know two or three firms who might put the matter through for us, but I want to make quite sure first that we're dealing with people who'll agree to keep the whole thing confidential. We want to find a firm that'll help us out a bit with our scheme. They'll get their money all right, so they ought to agree not to answer any questions other people might ask."

"Meaning my wife?"

"Exactly. They'll have to tell her that, so far as they're concerned, it's a business deal and they know nothing further about it. Oh, and then we've got to find a printer."

"A printer?" exclaimed Mr. Chedworth, much puzzled.

"We want some headed note paper," explained Carford. "As a matter of fact, we want one sheet of headed note paper."

"Give it up," murmured Mr. Chedworth, helplessly.

"Come with me to look for an obliging printer," invited Carford, "and I'll explain the whole thing to you as we walk along. And after that you can go back home again."

"Not till it's too late to start on those floors, I don't go home," stated Mr. Chedworth, very positively.

"Oh, you won't have to do them now. There'll be carpets to come out of this," and Carford tapped the check that Mr. Chedworth had passed him.

"What, by first thing to-morrow morning?"

"Don't see how I can put you out of your misery before noon," returned Carford. "But you can make a pretty slow start, can't you? You won't mind just beginning the job in a nice, quiet artistic way, will you? You'll know that Sister Anne is on the watch-tower, and that help is coming!"

Together they set out to find a printer. By good luck, they stumbled on a small jobbing shop where the shutters were just being put up. Rushing into the establishment, Carford succeeded by cajolery and generosity in persuading the proprietor to put through his special order without delay.

"I'll see it through for you myself," promised that worthy. "Come back and knock at the door in a couple of hours' time, and you'll find the job done and waiting for you. But it's one of the queerest I've ever took on, all the same! Just two sheets of headed note paper! Wait a bit," he exclaimed, suddenly conceiving a suspicion, "it's quite all right, I suppose. No hanky-panky?"

"There is no hanky," Carford solemnly assured him, "nor is there any panky. There's nothing illegal in it."

"Practical joke—something of that sort?" the printer wanted to know.

"Exactly," conceded Carford. "Something of the sort."

Outside the shop again, he addressed a few parting words of instruction to Mr. Chedworth.

"Oh, I'll do *my* share all right," Mr. Chedworth assured him. "Trust me! It's

too neat an idea to spoil. I'll be very careful. What a surprise it's going to be!" he said.

IV.

He was home in time to join in at the ragged edge of supper, when everybody had finished but Norman, who was pretending an abnormal appetite in order to delay his dispatch to bed.

"Well, did you get on all right at the office?" asked Mrs. Chedworth quickly, as soon as her husband put in an appearance.

"Twenty-five pounds," he answered.

She was divided between satisfaction in securing the money and disappointment over the smallness of the sum.

"Twenty-five pounds won't go very far," she remarked. "I was hoping you'd be able to let me have more than that. You can't buy much for twenty-five pounds."

"It would mean some new chairs for the drawing-room," pointed out Gladys. "You said that they were what you wanted most."

"We want almost everything new!" declared Mrs. Chedworth in a voice that drove Gladys from further discussion.

"Twenty-five pounds was the best I could do," said Mr. Chedworth. "Had a bit of a job to draw that. Some of it's payment in advance, really. They made a bit of a favor of letting me have it. I shan't be able to do it again, not for a long time now."

"But—but there's all sorts of things we shall have to keep replacing," returned Mrs. Chedworth blankly. "The new house will show up all our shabby old stuff. I shall be ashamed to let people see it."

"Then why let 'em see it?" asked her husband. "Why not go quiet and don't ask any friends in till—"

"Oh, don't talk so stupid! We must keep up our position, mustn't we? We've *got* to entertain. We owe it to the children! Though how I shall feel when people drop in and see all this dreadful furniture in that nice new house, with all those large, light windows, and all—!"

"It was your idea to move," he reminded her. "You were set on the idea of getting a larger house. You—we ought to have thought all this out before we took the new place."

She stared angrily at him. He was revealing a spirit which never before had she suspected him of possessing. He had openly ventured to criticize when aforetime he had always been so subserviently ready to agree with and approve of everything she did!

"We'll have to be a bit more careful in future," said Mr. Chedworth, amazed and delighted at his own audacity in rebuking his wife.

Oh, his nerves had picked up wonderfully! Pity he hadn't been able to stand up to her like this from the start-off of his married life. Perhaps even now it wasn't too late to claim his rightful place as head of the house? He'd only got to be firm, and—

"Being away from home all the week seems to make you very independent all of a sudden!" observed Mrs. Chedworth witheringly. "I should like to see you when you're traveling! Quite important, I dare say! I'll have to see if I can't manage to come with you one of these weeks."

Mr. Chedworth's temerity abruptly dwindled.

"I was only saying we'd have to go careful," he mumbled.

"Careful? Of course, we've got to be careful!" she retorted. "How can we be otherwise than careful when twenty-five pounds seems such a fortune to you? And what you think I can do with it, I don't know! There's lots and lots of things—"

"I—I suppose there is," he agreed. "And I—I wish I could let you have the money. But—well, you know how it is yourself. If only I had a bit of luck—"

"A bit of luck!" she cried scornfully. "What bit of luck could you be expecting, I'd like to know?"

"None," he admitted. "At least—"

He was quiet for a few seconds.

"If only I was to have a bit of luck in that—that Surprise Lottery," he remarked, lingering on the final words. "If something was to come off there—"

"What lottery is that? You never told me anything about going in for a lottery."

"It's—it's the Surprise Lottery," he

mentioned, diffidently. "Ever so many prizes. Quite big ones, some of 'em. I—I took a ticket one day, ever so long ago. I'd almost forgot about it, till I saw something in the paper about the prizes being awarded this week."

"I never saw anything about it! I expect it's just a swindle or something," she asserted hostilely. "How much did you have to pay for your ticket?"

"Half a crown."

"Half a crown flung away!" she declared.

"Oh, I don't know. Not that I really expect to win anything, but—"

"I should think not! I should have thought you'd have had more sense than to go wasting your money like that! Just as if anything good was likely to come our way!"

"You never know," he told her, heavily.

"I can *guess!* Well, you can have your big prizes and your tickets and all the rest of it. I'd rather have that twenty-five pounds you've drawn and make sure of it. Will you give it to me now, or in the morning?"

"Better take it now," he said, and handed her a little wad of notes. "All the same," he insisted, "if I was to win a prize in that lottery—"

"*If!*" she scoffed antagonistically. "If pigs had wings! Why, even if it isn't a swindle, there must have been thousands and thousands go in for it. What chance do *you* think you stand?"

"Good as any one else, I dare say."

"Oh, get on with your supper, do!" she requested heatedly. "What's the good of talking? And don't forget there's those floors waiting to be done to-morrow."

V.

Mr. Chedworth, at breakfast next morning, protracted that meal for as long as he dared, but at last he could no longer withstand the promptings of his wife.

"Yes, my dear; coming now," he announced, and rose to set out for The Larches.

A sort of procession formed itself. In the van marched Mrs. Chedworth and Gladys. Behind them walked Norman, bearing a large can of floor stain, and Kathleen bore the brush and an odd array of rags for cleansing it. At the tail of this domestic pageant moved Mr. Chedworth, reluctant, fretful and keeping a watchful gaze traveling up and down the thoroughfare for anybody who might look like a special messenger.

The floors seemed even larger than they had appeared the day before by the time that Mr. Chedworth had slowly removed his coat and donned an old overall of his wife's.

Gladys and Mrs. Chedworth passed on to upper regions. Norman and Kathleen, fearful of tasks being found for them, returned home unobtrusively.

Mr. Chedworth began his hated labors.

He had covered but an insignificant amount of floor space when there came interruption.

Norman clattered up the steps.

"Letter just come for you, pa," he called excitedly. "Brought special."

He handed the missive to his father. Mr. Chedworth wiping his hands carefully on the overall, prepared to open it.

"What is it you want, Norman?" called Mrs. Chedworth from upstairs.

"Letter. Come special for pa."

Mrs. Chedworth descended. It was her habit to be at hand when Mr. Chedworth opened his correspondence.

"Why, whatever?" she exclaimed.

Mr. Chedworth, looking bewildered, was shaking his head at a typewritten letter he was holding with quivering fingers.

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Chedworth.

"Well, I'm—I'm blessed!" whispered Mr. Chedworth, in the deepest amazement.

"What is it?" again demanded Mrs. Chedworth.

"That lottery! That Surprise Lottery!"

She snatched the letter from him. And this is what she read on a sheet of note paper very tastefully printed at the head with the words:

GRAND SURPRISE LOTTERY
Mayfair, London

Mr. C. H. Chedworth, Esq.:

Dear Sir—We have pleasure in notifying you that you have won the third prize in connection with our lottery. Pray, accept our

congratulations. The third prize is, as you know, furniture to the value of five hundred pounds.

We have notified the Royal City Furnishing Company of your success, and should be glad if you will call there at your earliest convenience to select goods to the value of your prize. Please show this letter to the manager and produce evidence of your identity.

Followed more congratulations and a vague signature.

"Gladys—*quick!*" shrilled Mrs. Chedworth, at the end of a stunned thirty seconds.

She turned to her husband. "Never mind about doing those floors now!" she said. "We shall be able to have carpets! lovely carpets! Now off you go back home and tidy yourself, and me and Gladys and you will go straight down at once to the Royal City Furnishing Company!"

And this they did, and were there received very amiably by the manager. Mr. Chedworth produced his proofs of identity and they were accepted without question.

"I don't suppose you'll want me to stop any longer here now?" said Mr. Chedworth to his wife. "If you and Gladys are going to choose furniture, you won't want me hanging round."

"No, we'll be able to look after everything all right now," she assured him. "Just fancy, five hundred pounds' worth of furniture to choose, all through that lovely lottery! Isn't it most wonderful luck!"

Mr. Chedworth did not again see his wife till she and Gladys returned home, weary but well content at tea-time.

"Oh, we've had a splendid day!" declared Gladys.

"Chose the five hundred pounds' worth all right?" he asked indulgently.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Chedworth. "It came to even a bit more. Just on twenty-five pounds more. Luckily, I had that twenty-five pounds you gave me with me in my purse. Furniture's a dreadful price! *Good* furniture is, at all events. And we've bought nothing but good stuff. We did not know when we might get the chance again."

"The loveliest chairs for the drawing-room!" sighed Gladys.

"Gilt!" amplified Mrs. Chedworth raptly. "Gilt and brocade. They were horribly expensive, but I simply couldn't resist them. What Mrs. Marchison will say when she sees them—! And a new sideboard for the dining room! Oh, and lots of things!"

"And didn't the total run up quickly?" recalled Gladys almost with awe.

"My dear, I was horrified when he told me we'd already exceeded the five hundred pounds!"

Mr. Chedworth nodded comprehendingly. That was just like his wife, he thought. She had no idea how to spend money reasonably and properly. No wonder she was always wanting cash. She just bought and bought, without thinking.

"One blessing, we weren't much over the limit," observed Mrs. Chedworth. "We were able to keep all we'd selected. I couldn't have made up my mind to go without a single one of the things we'd chosen."

"It would have been difficult," agreed Gladys. "And those rugs will certainly look lovely on the stained floors, won't they?"

"Eh?" ejaculated Mr. Chedworth.

"Oh, we hadn't even looked at carpets when we got to the end of the five hundred pounds," explained his wife. "However, I bought several beautiful rugs with that twenty-five pounds. They'll look even better than carpets!"

"You—you didn't buy any carpets?" quavered Mr. Chedworth.

"Not one!" answered Mrs. Chedworth, very cheerfully. "However, it doesn't matter. The floors will look lovely with those rugs on them. You'll have to start staining those boards first thing to-morrow morning. And you can finish them when you come home next week-end!"

THE END

The next story in this series, "The Cock of the Walk," will appear shortly.

The Mathematics of Guilt

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "Liberation," "McCarty Incog," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

DREAD OF BITTERNESS.

JOHN paused in the middle of the field to wipe the sweat from his forehead and overcome the strange dizziness which still recurred, although it was a month since he had awakened in the attic room that he had thought so wretched and mean; now it would have seemed palatial, for he had not slept in a bed since he was able to work on the farm.

He had long since ceased to speculate on the disappearance of his wallet; whether the strange motorist or one of the farm-hands who rescued him had been the thief was of little moment since it was gone and with it his last cent. He was convinced that Abraham Cleghorn and his wife, hard and dour as they were, were scrupulously honest, but after the doctor had been settled with from the few dollars in his pocket, John was still in their debt for board, medicines and the necessary clothing in which to work.

He had lost weight and strength, too, for the coarse, sour food, scrapings of the farm after everything marketable had been thriftily sold, and which repelled even his fellow laborers, was almost impossible for John to swallow, and the hard work, long hours and sleepless nights, huddled with the rest on moldy straw under the long, low, foul sheds had reduced him to a gaunt shadow of his former self.

The dread of imprisonment which had dogged him for months could not have been much worse or more degrading, John

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thought bitterly, than these weeks of virtual slavery, and his spirit had suffered far more than his body under the galling strain, but freedom was at hand at last. To-night at the ringing of the supper bell he would have paid his debt in full and earned three dollars to boot. Three dollars capital with which to fare forth, broken in health and low in spirit.

There was philosophy without self-commiseration in his outlook, however. He would at least be his own master once more, and here at this remote farm no agents of Telford's had sought him. Without funds he could not travel and without strength he could not do manual labor, but if he stuck to the smaller villages and outlying country and managed to subsist until the extended check became due, whatever he might be able to collect on it from the bankrupt Silsby would carry him through the winter in some distant part of the land.

The thought of approaching Silsby before that date was as impossible of consideration as would be the idea of entering Brookville again, even stealthily and by night, in his present condition and the tattered, tramplike garments which were all that remained to him. Better far if he died by the roadside rather than risk appearing a failure, a wreck, before—before those who had respected him.

The memory of Rose was ever with him, but in the humility of his bondage he had forced it resolutely from him. In this lowly place, in his present humiliation, it seemed a desecration. He had read in the county newspaper that had found its way into his hands that Brookville was emerging from the wreckage left by the flood, and once the senior Williston's name was mentioned as one of the leaders in the work of rehabilitation, so he knew that all was well with Rose and her people, at least.

The sun still glared down on him in one of the last outbursts of heat of late September, but a brisk breeze had sprung up and John's brain had cleared as he raked away at the stubble once more. Harvest time was over, most of the farmhands had migrated elsewhere and in the woodlands the first touch of yellow and red had come to the trees.

This time last year he had been contented and filled with well-being, ambitious in his work, proud in the respect of his associates, happy in the companionship with his foster father. That was just before his discovery of the embezzlement, before he had dreamed of what he must some day be called upon to assume; now he was a clod, a farmhand, and to-morrow he would be a follower of the road.

The sun sank low upon the western horizon, shadows from the peaked roofs of the barns lengthened across the brown fields and at last the jarring clang of the bell sounded brazenly from the house.

John finished his row carefully, stacked the rake with the others against the wall of the tool-house, and went to the long trough where the men washed up. His bag had been left forgotten on the train from Hooper Junction to The Corners when he jumped off on hearing of the threatened flood, and now he had little to carry.

He put on the blue serge suit which he had cleaned and mended with painfully clumsy, unskilled hands, tied his few belongings in a parcel and made his way to the kitchen. The cold beans swimming in rancid molasses, apple sauce made from "spoilings" and stale coffee sickened him, and when the meal was over he presented himself to Abraham Cleghorn on the back porch.

"I'm leaving, Mr. Cleghorn."

"So you be." The farmer arose in his stockinged feet and thudded into the house to return with a roll of bills in his hand. "You behaved yourself right good, an' done's well's you could consid'rin' the hurt you done to yourself. Let it be a warnin' to you, young man, if so be y' ever git to hev 'nother auto, not to run it wild. Here's two dollars an' eighty cents that's comin' to you, twenty off fer the cup you broke last week; sasser's no good 'thout it—I'm sure we wish you well."

John accepted the money without comment other than an ironic farewell, and picking up the newspaper-wrapped parcel which he had left beside the steps, he walked wearily down the path and through the gate.

The casual references to the county seat

and the nearest freight stations which he had overheard from time to time, showed him that he was somewhere in the rolling meadowlands below the western slope of Carbon Ridge. On the other side commenced the coal region and John turned south, hoping to strike the highroad to the east. Somewhere in the mining district he might obtain clerical work of some sort, and on the way he must live and earn enough beside to replace his patched, shrunken garments.

But he was so weak from lack of proper nourishment, so worn out with the work that had started before dawn, that he was very soon stumbling, unable to drag himself farther. When the moon came up, pale and cold, he crept into the shadow of a fence corner and fell instantly into a deep, drugged sleep.

When he awakened he found himself chilled and stiff, the old hurt tendons aching afresh, but he arose and walked on until he came to a brook. There with a cheap razor from his bundle and a bar of hard soap he prepared as well as he could for a call at a farmhouse near by, from the chimney of which smoke was rising among a group of tall trees.

Here he meant to obtain a real meal if it cost him half his capital, and he sniffed hungrily at the faint aroma of new-baked bread on the air as he strode up the path, but a woman appeared suddenly in the doorway with a broom poised at a belligerent angle.

"What d'you want?" she demanded shrilly.

"Breakfast." John smiled waveringly. "I don't know how far I am from a village and I thought if you wouldn't mind—"

"We got nothin' for tramps here," the woman interrupted still more shrilly as he continued to advance toward her, but at that word he stood as though transfixed. "Give one o' you a handout, an' the whole tribe come pesterin'. You be off!"

"I'm not a tramp," John asserted warmly. "I'm offering to pay you—"

"Then you stole the money!" she shrieked in anger. "You ain't no decent workin' man. Get out or I'll set the dog on you."

John turned without another word and went down the path to the road again, the humiliation biting deep. So this was what he had come to! Ordered away from a humble home as though he were a pestilential thing.

A tramp! He shuddered at the word and yet—what more was he? Only a few cents were between him and destitution and if he could not find such work as was possible to him, what would he become?

He passed two more farmhouses, but would not risk another scathing rebuke, and when he came at last to a small settlement the sun was high and he all but staggered as he walked. A sort of bakery served as the only restaurant in the village and here he obtained coffee and a supply of food to last him for the rest of the day, but the cost of it alarmed him. He must find work somewhere and soon.

But for three days no opportunity offered, although on the second he received a hot supper for cutting stovewood and on the third a bed and breakfast for loading apple crates. The last was exhausting work, however, and John was desperate. He had only a little over a dollar left of his pitifully hoarded supply; if the country could not offer means for bare existence he must try the towns, though danger might lurk for him at every turning. He could not skulk ragged and starving in the autumn fields and woods.

He had been gradually working up into the foothills of the ridge, and on the evening of the fourth day he came to a factory town, at the hour when the workers were pouring through the gates, men with lowering, brutish, foreign faces.

Spent with fatigue and his growing weakness John leaned against the fence and watched the rabble stream past, smiling bitterly to himself. Rabble, had he called them in his thoughts? They had clothing, food, shelter, steady work. Were they not far better off than he? Most of them must be going home now to families, no matter how squalid and dirty that home, how ignorant and unlovely the woman who waited. He was outcast even from them.

The quick tears of weakness and utter loneliness blurred his eyes and he turned

away, but a heavy hand fell on his arm and a rough but kindly voice sounded in his ear.

"Hey, bo, down on yer luck?"

John's very heart had stilled at the touch, but with the question he turned again. A young giant of perhaps his own age, one of the factory workers, from the grimy overalls and the dinner pail slung on his arm, but with light Saxon hair and a fair skin under the streaks of dirt, was grinning sympathetically at him.

John smiled back faintly.

"I'm looking for work. Do you think there's anything in there I could do?" The naïve question came impulsively, born of his vital need, and the workman stared in surprise.

"Yer don't sound like a bum!" he remarked. "And yer 'pear as though yer oughter be lookin' fer a horspital 'stead o' a job. Watser matter?"

A warmth unknown for many days stole over John, but pride reasserted itself.

"Nothing," he replied hastily. "Had an accident a few weeks ago, but I'm all right now. Thanks."

Not for worlds would he tell the proverbial hard luck story, true enough in his case, to any one. The young man still stared, hesitated, and then observed:

"I got yer now! Yer a white-collar guy. Gee, yer must've had hard goin'. Got a place ter sleep ternight?"

"I—I haven't looked for any," John stammered. "I've just got in town."

"Well, I'll tell yer! C'mon home with me—got a little shack up on the hill—an' termorrer yer can look around."

John shook his head.

"It's—it's awfully good of you, mighty good, but I couldn't do that. You see, I've some money—"

Then weakness, the old dizziness, came over him once more and he closed his eyes, clinging to the fence for support. The stranger caught him unceremoniously by the arm.

"Yer come on with me and damn yer money!" he ordered gruffly with rough kindness. "I know you guys."

Unable to protest further John permitted himself to be led up the steep, narrow street to a row of workmen's cottages, into one of which his new friend took him and shouted lustily:

"All right, pop? Here's a friend I brought home."

The old man sitting in a rocker by the kitchen window with a quilt over his knees looked up and smiled a snaggle-toothed smile.

"Pleased ter meet yer," he said, evidently quite without surprise. "Pete, I been hitchin' 'round real good terday—peeled the potaters an' all."

His wrinkled hands on the arms of the rocker illustrated his mode of progression and at the childish pride in his voice "Pete" remarked aside to his guest:

"Pop used ter be foreman o' his department, but he's had a stroke." Aloud he added: "Lay down on that sofy over there till I get supper. We ain't got any womenfolks in our fambly now."

Utterly spent, John obeyed. They should have his dollar in the morning, of course; there could be no descent to charity for him. The unexpected kindness of the young man called Pete had almost unnerved him; he would never forget it, but to-morrow he would slip quietly away.

It appeared, however, that Pete had other plans. As he showed his guest into the little room off the kitchen, he remarked:

"After breakfast, if yer feel up ter it, go get some odd jobs—pop'll tell yer where ter look—till yer make enough fer an outfit. Yer'd get turned down cold if yer went in them clothes fer a clerking p'sition. C'mon back at noon an' yer can get pop a hot bite; it'll be better fer him than the snack I leave by his chair, an' I dassn't let him hitch near the stove."

John recognized the intent behind the crude tact of the suggestion and he could not repulse it. If he could find "odd jobs" and repay these good people he might have a chance to rehabilitate himself.

So for the next few days he sorted fruit and learned to dress a stand, aided in this by his brief experience at Honeymede Farms; he washed dishes in a quick-lunch establishment, delivered newspapers, sold potted plants from door to door and checked in a laundry. By the end of the week he

was able not only to pay as much board as Pete would accept, but to provide himself with a cheap but stout pair of boots, and a coat and felt hat from a second-hand store.

Next week he would be able to get a suit from the same source and then he would try for a clerkship; the weeks were passing, it was October now, and if he could only tide himself over until his strength came back—

"Say, Frank," Pete interrupted his musing. He had still kept the name chosen at random in the dingy hostelry at Shaftsburg. "Fixed anything for Monday?"

John shook his head.

"I'll get something," he averred, in the confidence born of the past few days.

"Well, I just met the night watchman at the First National and he says they want a guy to polish all that brass work there an' swab down the floors in the mornings 'fore the bank opens up. They got a woman regular, but she's down with rheumatism. I told him I'd speak ter a friend."

John turned pale to the lips, yet he had to control a desire to laugh at the irony of it. The late assistant cashier of the Empire State working again in a bank—as substitute for a scrubwoman.

But what did it matter? Wasn't it a job, at least, to keep body and soul together? John Merrick was dead and, he hoped, securely buried; it was good enough for Frank Kent, farmhand and odd-job man.

"I'll be glad to take it," he said soberly.

"Come, talk to the watchman now," Pete suggested. "I'll step round with yer."

So it came about that on Monday morning a gaunt, pale young man in a ludicrously shrunken suit of cottony blue serge mopped the imitation marble floor in the First National and industriously polished the ornate brass rails and grillework while the bitterness of death itself sunk deep in his spirit. By this crowning humiliation must he earn his bread.

He was drying the wide, shallow steps at the entrance preparatory to laying the rubber mats when a stout, gray-haired man in a dark blue topcoat, with a derby a size too small, approached the steps, halted on seeing him, stared and walked briskly away.

John gazed after him for a moment in surprise, then went on with his work, but out of the tail of his eye he noticed the man pass again with a quick side glance at him. What could he want? It was still early, before opening time; why was he hanging about the bank?

While John pondered the stranger appeared once more and this time he walked straight by the humble cleaner and up the steps to the door.

"Bank isn't open yet, sir," John ventured.

The man turned with a knowing smile.

"It is to me, porter." His tones were quick and incisive. "You're new here?"

A thin flush had come into John's face at the appellation, but it ebbed with a sudden thought.

"Yes, sir."

"Thought so." He hesitated as if to speak again, but thought better of it and nodding to the day watchman, passed within.

Who was he? John dared not ask, but a sudden conviction had come that made his treacherous nerves shake. He must be a bank detective! That was the only reason why he should show curiosity about a new employee however humble.

If he were, he had undoubtedly been apprised as all others of his ilk throughout the country, of the embezzlement from one of the biggest banking institutions in the East, and furnished with a description of the absconding cashier. Would he think to look for him as a mere cleaner?

John had been hired for the week; dared he stick it out? If the man showed any further interest in him, he must be wary, watch for the first sign of suspicion. God, why hadn't he thought of such a contingency when Pete first spoke of the job? Why hadn't he had sense enough to keep away from all banks as he would from the gates of prison itself?

His task was finished until the following morning, and he went downtown to solicit work for the intervening hours, but twice he thought he caught glimpses of the gray-haired man in the dark blue topcoat, and that night his sleep was broken and disturbed by vague fears.

The next morning, however, he was at his work at the bank even earlier than usual, polishing the grille of the cashier's cage when the same quick, incisive tones sounded just over his shoulder.

"How'd you like to be inside of it?" they said.

John dropped the chamois and whirled about. The man he dreaded was just behind him, smiling in the peculiar knowing way of the day before.

"Did you speak to me—sir?" John demanded.

"Sure!" The other nodded easily. "I asked you how you'd like to be in back there, in charge of all that money."

So suspicion had already come! Had the detective recognized him from a description even yesterday? Had he wired? John's throat grew contracted and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, but he shrugged.

"I never thought about it," he mumbled shortly. "I'm just the cleaner here."

The man's grin broadened and he chuckled ominously.

"Maybe you'll get there some day. You've been doing odd jobs around town for the last week or so, haven't you? I've heard about you; where did you work last before you came to this town?"

He was cornered! John looked around wildly, but the day watchman was standing over by the door. Was he there by accident or design?

"I worked on a farm," John replied desperately. "Two or three of them, in fact. What about it?"

"Your hands look like it, but your speech doesn't sound that way; you're a man with education. Maybe we can find something better for you to do than this."

The old bunk, John thought contemptuously. Did the fellow think to fool him? It showed that he wasn't quite sure of his ground yet, that there was still time—!

"Thanks," he said shortly. "This suits me all right till I can do better for myself."

The man was evidently determined not to take offense, however.

"Maybe that'll be sooner than you think," he remarked genially. "I'll have a little talk with you to-morrow."

That night when Pete came home from the factory he found his father alone.

"Where's Frank, pop?" he asked. "I got great news fer him."

"He gone," the old man quavered. "He gimme this five dollars to hand you fer board since Saturday, that he was savin' fer a suit, an' he says he won't never ferget us, but he couldn't stay no more."

Pete sat down heavily on the edge of the sofa.

"Gee!" he murmured. "Can yer beat these white-collar guys?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MINNIE.

THE foliage of the countryside had turned from red and gold to russet and fallen from the stark branches, the fields and meadows were covered with brown stubble rimed with frost, and flower gardens had become mere tangled wastes of brittle stalks and thorny gray tendrils creeping flat upon hard-packed, chill earth, but in Cairnstown the seasons showed visible change only when winter brought heavy white blankets of snow to cover the harsh, perpetually bare gray shale—white blankets that were soiled and grimy before they melted, or were frozen in unlovely hummocks flecked with soot.

On the biting breath of a late October frost a wretched figure blew into the little mining settlement. It was as bony as a scarecrow, and, like a scarecrow, its faded, tattered garments fluttered in the sharp wind. It was, or had been, a man.

Now, with feverishly bright brown eyes burning deep in hollowed sockets, cheekbones almost protruding and pale lips drawn back fleshlessly it appeared scarcely human, scarcely alive as it tottered along through the huddled maze of shacks that surrounded the store and the ramshackle weather-beaten boarding house, with for the common center the long inclined plane, which rose seemingly from the heart of the earth to the huge breaker above.

The man's tall, frail figure bent before the blast, his claw-like hands clinging to rickety fence palings, and his thin coat fly-

ing open to disclose a suit that appeared to be of greenish gray, ridiculously short as to trouser leg and tight even for his emaciated frame. The occasional slatternly housewife who came to her door to stare callously after the miserable wreck did not look closely or she would have seen that there was something about this derelict unlike the others who constantly drifted into the settlement and out of it again. His thin face was smoothly shaven, his thin hands were clean and his thin, torn clothes, faded as they were, had been painstakingly patched and brushed until they bore an air of cleanliness, too, and of pitiful, defiant dignity.

One woman noticed this later in the day, but she was not a housewife. She was Minnie, the drudge of the miners' boarding house, and she came upon him sitting on the back doorstep.

Minnie herself was thin, with the flabby thinness of one who had once been round and plump; her absurdly small hands were distorted with work, and her mild blue eyes had the dull, faded look of one who suffered stupidly, without hope. Only her thick, pale-gold hair wound in two great ropes about her head redeemed her in the least, and yet the creature on the doorstep struggled weakly to its feet as if accustomed to rise in the presence of ladies.

"Och!" Her small, roughened hands flew to her breast. "You fetched a scairt fur me!"

"I'm sorry." A mere harsh whisper replied to her, but there was something in it that Minnie had not heard in a long, long time; something like deference, like respect. "I meant to ask—that is, do you need any help here? I've—I can wash dishes and clean windows and do repairing—"

He stopped as if that breath having been expelled he was too tired to draw another, and Minnie's eyes softened as she looked at him.

"How long makes it since you et?" she asked bluntly.

"Two days—three—I don't know." He gestured impatiently. "That isn't the point. I'm not begging. I want work."

Minnie was evidently a person of action, for she wasted no further words in sympathy.

"You wait wunst!" She disappeared within to return with a great hunk of hot stew-meat dripping gravy from between two thick slices of bread. "Eat now, and come back behind seven, yet. Missus, she ain't ower pleasured with strangers, but I make it some such work for you so you pay."

"You—I—?" John stammered but seized the food with ravening fingers. "I'll earn it. Don't think I won't be here."

A strident female voice from within yelled: "Min-nee!"

"Make it quick to Sandy McKim," John's new employer stepped back hastily and half closed the door. "Tell him I says could you set awhiles till it's seven o'clock. Give him it's Minnie Rance sends you!"

She shut the door and John turned away, hurrying as fast as his enfeebled condition would permit so that he would not be observed and perhaps bring trouble upon the young woman. He drew up in the shelter of a shale dump to devour the food she had given him, trying to force himself to eat slowly; he had learned to know what starvation was during the last three weeks.

The shoddy shoes which he had bought in the factory town were broken and worn through with the long, rough roads he had traveled, the winds of approaching winter had cut through his poor clothing like paper, chilling his thinned blood so that it scarcely moved through his veins, and his very brain worked sluggishly, playing strange tricks on him sometimes, but the mechanical struggle to exist had gone on without conscious volition.

Like an animal he had accustomed himself to creep into any deserted shelter to sleep and he had eaten whatever had been handed to him in payment for such odd jobs as he was able to get, but of the old John a spark yet remained; he would not accept the rare charity offered, he would not beg and he would not descend to grime in spite of his rags.

He had been told to "move on" so constantly in his quest that now, finishing the last morsel of food he started again along the crooked path that wound between the shacks. Where was it the woman had told him to go? He was to find "Sandy" somebody; oh, that was it, "McKim."

She had said her name was Minnie—Minnie Rance. But "Rance" was English, and she undoubtedly was not. There was something vaguely disturbing about her; John was almost sure he had never seen her before, but long ago he must have known people—some one—whom she reminded him of. Was it her voice, her speech?

He let the idle thought drift away as it would. It seemed too great an effort to pursue it, and though he felt a little stronger now that the ghastly emptiness, more horrible than actual pain, had been partly allayed, he was colder. It seemed as if all the blood in his body had gone to the assimilation of the food and his fingers were blue and stiffened so that he could scarcely grasp at support when a blast of sharp wind came.

A half grown boy was hammering at a fence post in a dooryard and John stopped.

"Where can I find Sandy McKim, son?" he asked.

The boy stared at him then shrugged and shook his head.

"Hey, he doan speek Engleesh." A frowsy, oily-looking woman had come out with languid curiosity into the next yard. "W'at you wan'?"

"Sandy McKim." John turned toward her. "Could you tell me where he lives?"

"Sure. See dat 'ouse by itse'f, wit' all kinds colors painted on it? Sandy doan know diff'runce, he ain't got no eyes since de gas got 'im. Who tol' you 'bout Sandy?"

Her curiosity had quickened now, but John shook his head.

"A friend," he said quietly and turned away.

The "house" was a shack that might have been a dozen feet square, with a bent, rusty length of stove-pipe protruding from the sagging roof and blotches of paper pasted against the jagged glass of the single window, like more than one other hovel in the immediate vicinity, but unlike their weatherbeaten walls it was painted in a veritable patchwork of colors, vivid and faded, clashing and blending in a strange chromatic effect against the gray of the hillside upon which it stood alone.

So Sandy McKim was blind! John shuddered. That at least had been spared him. It would be warm in his shack, though, for smoke was rising briskly from the crude chimney. Would he give welcome, temporary shelter to a stranger sent by this Minnie—Minnie Rance?

John crunched his way painfully up the path, the sharp shale cutting into his numbed feet through the paper with which he had stuffed the gaping shoes, and he had lifted his hand to knock when a deep but oddly gentle voice came from within.

"Lift the latch an' coom ben," it said. "Rest yersel' by the stove."

John obeyed the first injunction and stepping inside closed the door carefully. A huge, raw-boned old man with a white beard and shock of snowy hair was seated at a table in the center of the room, a rude chess-board squared with raised cross-strips before him and he lifted his head instinctively, directing the white-filmed eyes toward the newcomer.

"Ye've coom far?" the old man asked, and then went on: "Ye'll be tired an' the bench is waitin'."

"You are Sandy McKim?" John asked in his hoarse quavering tones. "A woman named Minnie Rance sent me; she told me to ask if I could stay here till seven o'clock to-night."

"Aye, an' welcome!" McKim's face had lightened at mention of the name, and John saw that he could not be as old as he had thought, after all. "Minnie's a gude lass. Ye'll find a clean pipe on the end o' the rack an' tobacco in the jar on the shelf. Ye've no' been here before, I'm thinkin'."

John came slowly forward, dropped on the bench and held out his shaking hands to the glowing stove.

"Thanks, sir," he said. "Would you mind telling me how you knew I was a stranger?"

McKim chuckled richly.

"Don't I ken the footsteps o' every soul in Cairnstown?" he countered. "'Tis five year an' mair since I was blinded in the pit doon awa', an' I've had lang to learn. But ye're no' smokin'."

He rose and walked with firm, sure steps to the pipe-rack, but although John's every nerve cried out for the solace so long denied him he protested:

"No, thank you. I'll just sit here, if you don't mind."

"Sit ye will, but smoke ye must," his host insisted. "A man's nobbut half that has n'a pipe in's mouth. Ye'll be lookin' for work, na doubt; mon, there's none here for ye. Ye're no' fit for the pit, an' 'tis a job wi' learnin' ye should seek."

He had filled a pipe and thrust it into John's hand, feeling lightly along his arm from his shoulder with quick, calloused fingers, and now he struck a match.

"McKim, I'm not going to deceive you," John cried desperately. The warmth from the stove was tingling through his body and mounting to his head like a drug. "I can't offer you a smoke in return, I can't offer you anything. I'm looking for work, yes, any kind of work, but I haven't found it yet. I don't know how you knew I wasn't strong enough to be worth while in the mine or that I was used to other work long ago, but the woman Minnie Rance sent me here because I hadn't any other place to go till seven. Then I'll be moving on."

"Will ye, so?" McKim asked mildly. "Draw gude, mon, 'twill hearten ye. Ye've buik learnin' by yer talk an' sair weakness by the voice an' feel o' ye. 'Tis a hard part o' the land for them that has n'a all their strength."

John shrugged.

"I just drifted this way after the harvest season closed down," he explained, adding: "I should have told you my name; it's Frank Kent, though it doesn't mean anything to anybody. I was a—a sort of clerk once, but I thought I'd try farming instead."

The heat was making him drowsy now, but he felt vaguely that he owed an account of himself to this man who had extended his humble hospitality. He had forgotten the other's blindness completely and the fact that he was moving deftly about the stove was not borne in upon his benumbed consciousness until a steaming cup of tea was extended to him.

"Drink ye this," McKim ordered. "Have ye eaten?"

"Yes. I—Minnie Rance gave me—" John choked. "I'm going back to do an errand for her at seven."

McKim nodded as though understanding as he filled his own cup.

"Minnie's a gude lass," he said again. "The Catlin woman works her cruel hard an' she would n'a stand it if she was over bright, but she has a heart as big as the universe."

"She doesn't belong here," John remarked abruptly. "I've known people that talk like her before somewhere, but I can't quite remember."

"She's Dutch, I'm thinking. The neighbor-folk said she was bonnie when she came with her mon a year an' mair ago. Is she so the noo?"

"'Dutch'!" John repeated. A revealing flash of memory had come to him. Petrus Feldmeier! The Honeymede Farms. That was whom she had vaguely reminded him of, the kindly man who might have been his friend. Then he roused himself to reply: "She's Mrs. Rance, then? You mean, is she pretty? I didn't notice. She has very soft blue eyes and yellow hair, but she looks tired, sort of—frightened. Why doesn't she go away if she's treated badly? Her husband ought to take better care of her!"

McKim shook his head slowly.

"She's none, the noo," he remarked briefly. "Dick Rance was a fine-spoken lad, but a wild, bad lot, an' when Pat Mahaffy sacked him—he was timekeeper at the pit for twa month—he went awa' an' he dinna tak' Minnie with him."

The drowsiness had passed and the steaming hot tea had put new life into John's weary body. He was grateful to Minnie Rance and sorry for her pitiful but not uncommon story, but the name which McKim had uttered troubled him. Where had he heard of Pat Mahaffy before? It was associated in his mind with fear. That impression was strong; the old, haunting fear of the law. Had he wandered into danger again?

"It's too bad about the poor young woman, but her husband may come back," he said absently, aware that the other's sightless eyes were turned upon him. Then the question forced itself from his lips. "Who is Pat Mahaffy?"

"He's foreman here." McKim knocked

the ashes from his own pipe and laid it on the shelf to cool. "Some call him hard, but he's just and fair-minded. 'Twould be na kindness to ye to encourage ye to think he might gie ye work, for he's na patience wi' illness an' misfortune. 'Tis only the rough an' strong he's any use for. Wi' winter coomin' on drear ye'd best be headin' for the cities, lad, after whiles.

"For the noo, I'd tak' it kindly if ye'd bide an' do for me. 'Tis no' easy for me to get about wi'out eyes, an' lonesome wi' no' a soul that speirs things to talk aboot. There's twa cots, ye ken, an' a buik or twa that has na been opened these five year. I'd like fine to hear bits frae them again."

It was charity he was offering, but there was a wistfulness in his tone that told of his shut-in, solitary life, and a longing for the books he could not see that made John hesitate. It would be a real haven for him, and perhaps he could repay with his companionship, for a few days, at least. It was a strange thought for him, outcast as he was, that any one should want him, need him. A queer lump came into his throat and he tried to protest, but in the end an agreement was made.

Under the older man's direction he prepared the simple supper, taking pains to eat lightly in spite of his craving and after cleaning up the little room and the luxury of rehabilitating himself as far as his worn clothing would permit he set out for the boarding house again.

Minnie Rance was waiting for him on the kitchen doorstep, wrapped in a heavy old coat and when he came forward into the glow from the window behind her she arose.

"I conceited you would come like you says." Her voice was soft. "You went by Sandy McKim, ain't not?"

"Yes, and I can't thank you!" John exclaimed. "He's a fine old man. He asked me to stay with him for a while—says I can take care of him, though I saw he was well able to do that for himself—and read to him. I believe you knew he would ask me, when you sent me, Mrs. Rance!"

It seemed to him that the shapeless figure tensed.

"He told you who I was, a'ready? Folks calls me Minnie mostly and it pleasures me best." She spoke quietly, but with a sort of dignity as though it were a command. Then her tones softened once more. "You will make the readings for him from his books, yet? That will anyways be for him a comfort what he ain't had for—och, since he gets a blindness in the mines, I would guess."

"But unless I get something to do I can't pay, and I can't live on a blind man," John spoke as though to himself. "I can't accept his charity."

"Now you talk which-whither!" Minnie said impatiently. "Maybe it was anyways fur him the likewise fur you that I sent you to him, wunst. You needs all both the other, ain't not? I saw you was clean, you would not beg or even take without you do some such a thing to pay, you talk better as Pat Mahaffy or the superintend yet, and—and you treat me the likes I was a lady. I have a thought you would be good fur Sandy McKim the whiles you was getting a little strong."

"It was a kind thought," John responded earnestly. "But I mustn't keep you out here in the cold. Tell me what I can do to pay you for the food, and for sending me to McKim?"

"I been trying hard to fetch a thought about that, but there ain't nothing," she admitted honestly. "Only you stays by Sandy McKim fur a whiles. He is friends by me, the only friend I got here."

"Then why don't you go away?" John asked impulsively. "He says the woman here makes you work too hard. Why don't you go back to your own people?"

Minnie drew herself up and after a little pause she said slowly.

"Peoples I ain't got no more."

There was a yearning wistfulness in her tone, however, and John went on:

"You must have friends back where you came from. You're Dutch, aren't you?"

"I inherited from the Dutch, but now I don't belong anywheres." She shivered as though she were cold in spite of her coat. "I got to go in afore missus outens the lights—"

"You don't belong here, anyway," John interrupted. "I suppose you think I'm crazy or—or pretty fresh to talk to you this way, a homeless tramp without a job or a cent to his name, but—doesn't McKim tell you you ought to get out of this and go back?"

"Sandy McKim makes a goodness by everybody, but he can't get himself on to the hint of why I don't feel fur going no place else, whatever. He don't know it the Dutch like what I do."

"I know one!" John's thoughts had gone swiftly back to Honeymede Farms and half unconsciously he spoke. "He's a fine man, too, and you ought to see the farm he runs. Acres and acres of wonderful orchards, and hothouses and gardens full of growing things for the market, but the best you ever saw. He loves them, too, and you would. That's the kind of a place you ought to be, not in this bleak coal country."

"'Acres—of growing things—he loves them'!" Minnie's whisper was so low and broken that he scarcely heard it in the moan of the wind about them. Then she clutched his arm in a grip that was almost fierce. "What is the name of your friend, yet I—maybe he is anyways somebody I used to know."

"It's Petrus Feldmeier." John paused, but Minnie's hand had left his arm and gone swiftly to her lips as though to still them. He waited and then asked: "Do you know him?"

Minnie's hand dropped, and she shook her head.

"No. There is many Dutch farmers, ain't not? Now I must in quick, and tomorrer it's Sunday; but that makes fur nothing here, only I gets me the time outen behind five o'clock. You should borry you some clothes off Sandy McKim and comes it then I fetch my needles by his house and anyways upmends you. More you could tell me then about your friend, not? I give you good night."

She nodded, and slipped into the house, and John turned and struck off for the low light burning halfway up the hill, where Sandy McKim was waiting for him. Waiting for him!

And he owed it to that girl back there, that exile, like himself, who could not go back. What could he ever do for her in return?

CHAPTER XIX.

TO ONE WHO WAITED.

THE old Scotchman snored peacefully on his cot, the glow from the stove illuminating his clean-cut, firm features, strong even though relaxed in sleep; but across the room John tossed and turned restlessly.

It was the first time he had rested in a warm shelter, in a bed even, since he fled from the factory town; the first night in many that he had tried to sleep without the torment of gnawing hunger; but the girl's soft, broken speech had brought back Feldmeier so strongly to his mind that he could not banish the memory, and lay going over in painful detail those quiet days spent at Honeymede Farms.

There was something about it, too, that troubled him by its elusiveness; something that he felt he ought to recall; but the effort was vain, and the memory of Feldmeier's disappointment in him and the manner of his dismissal burned hotly.

Every trivial incident in that interview at the manager's cottage returned, every word that the grave kindly man had said: "If a man is honest yet he ain't got the needs to use no other name—such a man I couldn't anyways trust—I wouldn't feel fur any such a body by the farm."

He had been right, of course. John seemed to see him standing before him now in his clean, spacious kitchen with its pathetically bare, unhomelike look, and then he remembered the little pair of scissors and thimble on the mantel. Of course! He'd forgotten that Feldmeier's wife had run away from him with another man.

Who was it had told him? Oh, yes, it was one of the shippers, and he had heard them talking about it afterward. The chance phrases that had drifted out to him on the porch that night sounded again disjointedly in his ears.

"Pretty as a picture—young enough to

be his daughter. Owner sent him up from Philly to keep the books—one o' them slim, dressy fellers—up and run off, the two o' 'em — two year now and nary a word—you'd think he forgot, only sometimes he stands looking off down the road like he was expecting somebody. Minnie, he used to call Mis' Feldmeier!"

Minnie! John sat up on his cot and took his head in both hands. It couldn't be! Was he going crazy? Had suffering and privation turned his brain that such wild, improbable notions should come to him?

It was inconceivable that he should wander here by chance and encounter Feldmeier's runaway wife, and there were countless Minnies in the world, yet this one had as much as admitted that she dared not go back to her people after denying their existence at first; she had shown unexpected emotion when he mentioned the farm, and when she heard Feldmeier's name she had covered her mouth as if to stifle a cry.

She would be here to-morrow; she was coming in her one respite from the drudgery at the boarding house to mend his wretched rags. To-morrow he would know.

Memory once kindled would not be so easily put out of mind, and from the problem of this girl who had been kind to him, it bore him back swiftly to that other—the girl he loved. He had tried to forget, not in disloyalty, but in fear lest his very longing should drive him mad.

Sometimes, when he had been faint and light-headed from want of food, he had had visions of her nearness to him; it seemed to him that she touched him, spoke to him, looked into his eyes with her deep, violet-blue ones, and the joy had been so exquisite that the return to grim reality was to die a hundred deaths.

Yet, now, with the thought of her came peace, and with her face before him he fell at last into a deep, healing sleep.

The next morning after the breakfast things were cleared away and the little one-room shack made neat and tidy, John spoke of Minnie's intended visit that afternoon.

"Aye," McKim nodded. "I thought she'd be coomin'. Most o' her Sunda' afternoons she spends wi' me, for the womenfolk hereaboot are no' for her. I'll gie ye the loan o' a coat an' breeks, for though I don' hold wi' sewin' o' the Sabbath, as weel she kens, it's her only time an' I'll no' deprive her o' the pleasure o' mendin' ye op. A good lass!"

"She says you're her only friend," John hesitated and then added: "McKim, you told me her story yesterday; as much of it, I guess, as you know; and said she was badly treated where she works, and I told you she looked tired and frightened. Now, I'm only a stranger to both of you, but I owe you both a lot. I said I'd known somebody who talked like her, with that Dutch dialect, you know; but I couldn't remember. Well, I did later.

"I'd heard another story about a girl named 'Minnie,' and when I talked to her last night—well, it came to me that she might be the same. If she is, she's afraid to go home, and she needn't be! She's wanted badly, there's some one been waiting for about two years, and she'll have a chance to be happy again herself and bring happiness to some one else.

"Couldn't you help me find out, and tell her for her own sake, if she's the girl? I know this sounds almost crazy, that I should drift in here and find her; but there is a possible chance, and after her kindness to me I—I'd like to help her."

There was silence for a space after he had finished, and McKim puffed reflectively at his pipe.

"Well, lad, it's a rare, ticklish job; but if Minnie is the lass you think, then she must be told. Ye may be makin' a mistake, an' yet again it might be the hand o' Providence that led ye here. Tell her the story o' this other lass when she cooms ben this afternoon an' get her to speak noo an' then. I can tell by her voice, I'm thinkin', whether it strikes hame or no'." He paused, and when he spoke again it was evident that he chose his words warily. "I did tell ye all I kenned aboot Minnie; but there's mair I guessed that mak's me think maybe ye hae the right o' it."

He stopped with an air of finality, and John saw that for the time being the topic was closed. He arose and went over to the shelf of books. Philosophy, Shakespeare,

Cowper, Burns, Plutarch passed in quick review before his eyes, and at the end of the shelf he saw a battered, ancient Bible.

"What shall we read, McKim?" he asked cheerfully. At his move the old man had tensed in his chair with eager expectancy, and now he cried:

"The Buik, mon! 'Tis five year syne I heard any preachin', an' then only when I could gae to the nearest toon! There's no' a body here kens the Word but Minnie, an' she canna read verra gude. I'm fair anxious to hear the Buik once mair."

So during the long day John read the Bible until his voice, hoarse from exposure, failed him, and McKim listened avidly, pounding his chair now and then when a sonorous phrase stirred him. Minnie had to knock twice before she could be heard, and John closed the great tome and went to the door.

Her drawn face was flushed and rosy from the wind, and there was a little sparkle in the vacuous blue eyes. John could readily see that she might have been "bonnie"; that she might even be again if happiness came.

McKim had fitted him out from his own scanty wardrobe for the occasion, and Minnie had brought, in addition to her sewing materials, a huge bottle of cleaning fluid whose fumes presently filled the shack. There was no opportunity for talk until she seated herself at last and brought out a roll of blue patches of various sizes and shades, and began matching them to the worn suit.

"Minnie"—McKim's tone was artlessly mild—"hoo's the Catlin body treatin' ye of late?"

She looked up as if to meet his eyes.

"The likes she always does. I would guess I ain't smart, maybe, else I should learn it to make better; but I can't get on to the hang of this here hunkie cooking, whatever. It wouldn't wonder me if she should outen me."

Her voice was flat and dreary, and the light and flush had gone from her face. McKim struck a match viciously on the sole of his boot and applied it to his pipe.

"She'll no' be such a ninny," he averred. "There's na ither body would work as ye do for such a pittance, and weel she kens it. Ye'll be gettin' sense some time an' gang hame."

Minnie darted a quick glance at John, then bent again over her sewing without comment and he asked:

"Shall I tell you some more about my friend Feldmeier, Minnie?"

She shook her head.

"Fur why?" she countered. "I ain't got the pleasure to be 'quainted with him."

"Well," John went on with elaborate indifference, "I thought you might like to hear about him since he's one of your own people. It's pretty sad, though, to think of him waiting and watching all this time."

"Waiting—" Minnie's work dropped to her lap, and she drew in her breath sharply. "Fur what he should wait?"

The simulated lack of interest was gone, and at the sudden trembling of her tones McKim stirred slightly in his chair.

"For his wife," John replied evenly. "You see, he worshiped her, but he isn't young any more, and she was only a girl, and an awfully pretty one. A good-looking, fine-spoken young man came to keep the account books of the farm, and she thought she cared for him, and one day they went away together."

"Och!" Minnie exclaimed sharply. Then she added very low: "She was wicked womans, ain't not?"

"I don't think so." John shook his head. "Not altogether. I think she was just foolish, and didn't quite understand what a fine husband she had."

"I would bet she knows it now, a'ready," she murmured fervently. "Always folks gets on to the hint of what makes right and good, only sometimes comes it too late yet. And so the man—her man—he waits fur to kill her, or anyways outen her from his door if she felt fur going back?"

"Oh, no, and it isn't too late." John bent forward. "That's the sad part of the story, that she doesn't know it. He waits and watches for her down the road every day, hoping she will return to him. He's always been ready to forgive. I saw her scissors and her little thimble—as small as the one you're wearing now, Minnie—on the mantel in his kitchen only three months ago. Her name was Minnie, too."

The girl had bowed her head and her thin shoulders shook, but now she burst out in a storm of wild weeping. McKim arose and fumbled beneath his cot, and John remained silent until she raised her tear-stained face.

"You knew!" she sobbed. "You knew when you come who I was a'ready. Mister wouldn't go to furgive, he couldn't."

"He's waiting," John reiterated quietly. "And I didn't know. I only guessed last night. Go back to him, Minnie. Think of it—your own home again, and that wonderful garden—"

"That makes nothing!" she cried. "So long I should be with him it wouldn't make me no matters was it prison yet. You—you ain't saying it what is a lie? He—he feels fur me still?"

"He loves you, and he always will," John returned solemnly. "You ought to know he isn't the kind to change. You're his wife—go back to him."

"If I could!" she sighed, and then added suddenly. "You have friends with him, and you should come here. Don't that make strange? And I don't know even what is your name."

John flushed and replied with averted face.

"It's Frank Kent; but he wouldn't remember it. You will go back"

"I can't," she began miserably; but McKim turned, strode over to her, and poured two handfuls of silver, with here and there the glint of a gold piece, into her lap.

"Ye're goin'," he announced. "Weel ye ken that I don't hae use for the half o' what the coompany gies me an' they'll tak' care o' me till I go."

"Ain't you lose your eyes in that upblowing of the powder blast when you saved three men, then?" Minnie interrupted. "Sandy, I can't take this, not noways; but now I work harder as ever, and maybe comes time I got enough fur the railroad—"

"Ye'll be startin' come morn," McKim interrupted in his turn. "Pat Mahaffy's goin' to the freight station at Schenck's Hill, an' this lad here will tak' word to him this night frae me to drive ye over. Ye'll buy a bonnie gown an' ither fixin's at Shaftsburg an' gae hame no beggar, my lass; but wi' a bit gold in yer pocket that ye earned by bein' kind to a sightless old body who's just cumberin' the earth. Gi'en ye have got this lad's mendin' done ye'll gae back to the Catlin woman an' tell her ye're through. I'd like fine to gae wi' ye to her! I'm thinkin' I've better words than you to mak' it plain!"

He chuckled, but when Minnie, still tearful with happiness, had departed, he shook his head with a sigh.

"'Twas Providence sent ye, Frank, lad; but I'll miss her sair. She'll be happy, blessings on her, and the will o' God sent ye straight to her door. Noo I'll write a bit o' a note, an' when ye get on yer clothes I'll ask ye to tak' it to Mahaffy. He lives yonder wi' the superintendent in the hoose back o' the breaker, ye'll no' miss it."

John arrayed himself in his neatly patched suit, while McKim drove a stub of a pencil laboriously over a piece of wrapping paper, and folding it, passed it over.

"There!" He heaved a sigh of relief. "Mahaffy knows the scratchin's I mak' when I write; but mind ye put it in his ain hands."

John found the cottage, the only building at the mouth of the mine which approached a conception of a comfortable human habitation, and knocked on the door. When it opened he was confronted by a man in his shirt sleeves with a rank cigar stuck in the corner of his coarse mouth; a stocky, red-faced man with big hands and feet who met his gaze with an inquiring leer.

A flash of memory crossed John's mind, and he stared dumbly. It was Pat Mahaffy himself who stood before him, and Mahaffy was the man in gray whom he had taken for a detective on the train from New York. He'd told his real name, he hadn't been following after all.

"Well, whatta you want?" the other demanded after a pause. "Don't stand there gaping like a loon. If you're after a job or a handout—"

"I have a letter here from Sandy McKim," John interrupted. Not for worlds would he have recalled himself now. "If you're Mr. Mahaffy, will you tell me what answer to take him?"

Mahaffy read the note and grinned.

"So Rance's girl is going home, eh? Tell Sandy I'll drive her over, all right; glad she's got sense enough to beat it back where she belongs."

As John plodded up the hill once more he realized that he had been hoping against hope for work here—any kind of a job that would pay McKim for his lodging. He knew now from the expression on the foreman's face when he spoke that there could be nothing for him, and in self-respect he could not remain under the roof of the little shack, a pensioner on McKim's bounty; McKim himself was a pensioner.

He must move on.

CHAPTER XX.

DERELICT.

NOVEMBER came with a steady deepening of the cold that presaged an early winter, and burrowed deep in a haystack in an open field lay a wretched figure, motionless save when it was shaken by a chill that seemed to rattle its bones.

John was very near the end, now. He felt it, knew it, and the conviction brought with it utter indifference. He had been aware of a vague surprise at this when the thought of approaching death first came to him, but now even that had passed, and only one thought remained—to see Rose once more.

She would never know, she couldn't recognize in the tattered ghost of a tramp the man who had once dared to tell her he loved her, even if she should catch sight of him, and he meant to take every precaution against that.

If he could only manage to live long enough to reach Brookville! He had lost all count of the gray days that passed in a monotony of cold and pain and hunger that tore at him like the claws of a wild beast, and instinct alone seemed to hold him in the direction he wanted to travel.

Now his mind frequently wandered, and he made no attempt to control his vagrant thoughts. They led always to Rose, and sometimes when the vision of her was very clear, and he could almost feel her presence, he forgot for the time his suffering. That the awakening was all the more bitter, he had come to accept with a sort of stoic philosophy; at least, for a little time she had walked with him, and soon he would be beyond all wretchedness.

Exposure and privation had done their work at last; the ache in his lungs that became a stabbing agony with each labored breath would have told him that even had it not been for the increasing weakness that would permit him to drag himself only a shorter and shorter distance each day.

Yesterday — or the day before, or the day before that—he had come upon a horse straying by the roadside, and following his tracks had led him home with the nebulous idea that it was too bitter cold for even an animal to wander without shelter. The surprised farmer had given him a meal; but he had been too long without food to eat very much of it, and since then there had been nothing.

Now he was within two or three miles of Brookville. Could he make the distance before nightfall? He had motored out this way with Rose when he taught her to drive her own little car in that fragrant, sunny June that seemed a thousand years ago. Yesterday he had seen familiar landmarks along the road; the spring where they had stopped to drink, the two trees which had arched overhead to make a natural bridge, the stone on the hillside that looked so much like a dog's head, the cottage with the score of tiny bird houses about it.

Last night, when he had crawled painfully into this sorry shelter, he had noticed just across the road a low, red barn about which lambs had played once, and Rose had insisted on getting out of the car and playing with them.

But was it the same? He could no longer trust to his impressions, so often did he walk in dreams. Perhaps those landmarks he saw yesterday had been merely figments of his imagination engendered by his longing. Perhaps he was miles out of his way, would never reach Brookville—

In a sudden frenzy of fear John clawed at the close-packed hay and peered out at the aperture. There over the way stood the red barn, and from a pen beside it a

plaintive bleating reached his ears. He sank back, overwhelmed with relief. He was near his journey's end.

But he could not wait longer. The sky was so heavily overcast that he could not judge accurately; but it must be somewhere near noon, and twilight came early. He must go on to the very outskirts of the village, then he could rest again until that dusk just before the lamps were lighted when it would be safest for him to approach.

Painfully he dragged himself out of the haystack and stood swaying. His shoes were bound with rags, and ground in the dirt of the soles were darker stains where his feet had been cut and bruised on the frozen ruts of the road; but he felt no pain. Instead, that old dizziness assailed him, and darkness closed down over his vision; but he leaned back against the hay until it had passed and then lurched out into the road.

The cold was less intense; but there was a feeling of snow in the air, and the clouds leveled into a smooth, leaden expanse. He noticed with lackluster eyes that what few cattle were in the fields had huddled close to the fence bars as if anxious to be taken under cover, and sparrows flew low in the bare trees, twittering uneasily.

Once a chipmunk, lethargic with cold, crept sluggishly into a niche in the stone wall he was passing, and farther on he came upon a field mouse dead in the road. Everywhere about him were signs of the winter which was upon the countryside at last, and winter had entered into John's own spirit. To see Rose again, just once, and then to crawl away somewhere and let the world slip from his loosened grasp, that was all he asked now.

Each breath was anguish, each step a labored effort; but he was afraid to stop, for he was still too far from the village; if he rested here his will would never carry him the remaining distance. He had passed several farmhouses; but no thought of applying at them for aid in his extremity had occurred to him. Work would have been impossible even if there had been any for him, and he would not beg; he wanted nothing but to reach his goal.

The fog had settled down over his brain again, and it seemed to him that Rose knew he was coming; that she had started to meet him. He felt that she must be coming to him around the next turning, and he began to run shamblingly, his arms half outstretched. Then he halted, brought partly to his senses; he must be careful now; he must control himself and keep his mind clear, for twilight was approaching fast, and there, just ahead, were the first clustering cottages of Brookville.

A pile of brush had been left neglected in a fence corner, and John crawled slowly up on it, sitting huddled with his back against a rail, and watched for the coming of dusk. It came over him gradually that he was no longer cold, a tingling fire was creeping through his veins, and with it a new sense of strength and vitality.

In a few minutes, now, when it grew a little more dim, he would walk past those cottages and slip into a narrow lane that would bring him out on the street back of the garage. Up that he would go, around the base of Mattis's Hill to the highway before the Willistons's house. No one would notice a tramp hanging about, and he would wait until he caught a glimpse of Rose.

No fear entered his thoughts that she might not be there this time; no idea presented itself that she might not pass before his eyes. It was for that moment he had lived through these days of horror and suffering, and it should not be denied him.

A little later, just when the last lingering light of the gray day failed, Ralph Silsby arose from his desk in the office of the garage, and with a weary sigh, started to turn on the lights. On the wide floor space there stood only his one remaining service car, the doctor's old sedan with stripped gears, and an ancient touring car with smashed lamps and twisted bumper. The building itself had been repaired; but too late to recapture the summer tourist trade, and of the little staff of mechanics and repair men who had worked under John Blake's tenure, only Joe stayed on at reduced wages.

The single bulb had flashed into subdued brilliance in the office and Silsby went to

the electric switch in the wall of the garage, but paused with his hand on the button. At a rear window—the same window through which he and John had climbed on the night of the flood — had appeared a shadow, the shadow of a man.

It was not completely a silhouette, for the light from the open office door showed a strange, wan, ghostly face with burning eyes and a stubble of beard. A shapeless felt hat was on the head, and a thin hand clutched at the coat drawn closely about the throat.

Silsby stared at the apparition and then took a step toward the window; but the figure seemed to melt away into the shadows, and abruptly he hurried out and looked into the alley, only to find that no one was there. If he had actually seen any one it must have been a wandering tramp, of course; but Silsby shivered; unkempt and miserable as the creature had appeared, there'd been something familiar about it. He could have sworn that he had seen a tattered, emaciated ghost of John Blake himself.

Half an hour later the Willistons's big limousine stopped at the gate, and a slim, girlish figure in a soft squirrel coat emerged. She turned to wave her hand to some one within as the car drove away, and then turned back again to the gate, but paused with her hand reaching out for the latch, for a figure had detached itself from the deeper shadows of the hedge. It was just on the edge of darkness, and the figure seemed abnormally tall and thin, its torn coat clinging loosely to it, and the face and hands mere colorless patches in the gloom.

The man made no attempt to approach her, but the two stood silently and gazed at each other for a moment, then with parted lips and widened eyes, Rose took a step forward as though hypnotized.

Instantly the stranger turned and fled down the road in a queer, lurching run like a wounded animal, and with a low, gasping cry Rose started after him, but drew herself up suddenly. Had she gone mad? The poor vagabond had looked ill, half-demented, perhaps, from the strange way his eyes had seemed to devour her.

It was as well that she had encountered him so near home, and yet—why had she taken that step toward him? When he fled why had she started to follow? With another little cry Rose covered her face with her hands and ran up through the dead garden to the house, just as the first flakes of snow of the winter floated softly down.

John was not conscious of the snow until later—how much later he never knew. He kept on mechanically down the road past the cottages and out into the open country, running crazily in sudden spurts until he stumbled and fell from sheer exhaustion.

He had lived to see her once again! She had looked into his eyes from under the little gray fur cap, with soft tendrils of her dark hair showing beneath it, her red lips parted in wonder, her small gray-gloved hand half outstretched toward him. He had had his desire, the desire that had kept life in his starved, frozen body through these endless days, and now he did not care how soon the end came.

But he must not die here on the open road. He must get as far away as he could, find some shelter in which to crawl and hide himself. He tried to rise, but fell back again, his lungs on fire, his head whirling and flashes of light darting across his eyes. At last he was able to get upon his hands and knees, and then gradually to his feet, where he staggered to the support of a stone wall and stood there gasping.

Everything was quite dark about him now, so dark that he must feel his way along the road; but he wasn't cold any more; he wasn't even hungry. Miraculously his head seemed to have cleared, and he took a tentative step or two, to find that he was really quite steady. It was the ground that was undulating so oddly, but he could keep his feet, and he started again along the road, instinctively following the wheel ruts.

Some one was walking ahead of him, and he couldn't quite make out the outline of the figure, for tantalizingly it seemed to keep an evenly spaced distance between them. He hurried forward, and the figure hastened, too; he slowed, and it appeared to halt. All at once a desire to overtake it took possession of him, and he tried to creep up on it, but it still eluded him.

The darkness had lighted as though a luminous veil was falling, and through it the figure moved as lightly as a will-o'-the-wisp, but it appeared to be changing. Now it was all in soft gray, and again it seemed clothed in draperies of filmy white; then it looked back and John saw that it was Rose.

He tried to call out to her to wait for him, but no sound came from his lips, and he was too tired to hurry. It didn't matter, for she would still be there before him. If only that fire wasn't burning him up inside. If only the ground wouldn't rise and fall so unaccountably beneath his feet.

Twice he had slipped and almost gone down upon his knees—if that happened he knew that he couldn't get up again, and she would go on, and he would lose her.

Her figure was growing indistinct, wavering before him, and an insidious drowsiness came over him. John tried to fight it down, but it was such a delicious sensation that he could feel himself yielding to it, his head nodding forward on his breast.

He brought it up with a jerk, and then stared, for Rose wasn't walking alone any more. Petrus Feldmeier was beside her, with Minnie clinging to his arm and laughing; there was Ralph Silsby, too, and blind old Sandy McKim, and Pete the young factory worker, with his father miraculously risen from his chair.

Who was that in the rear who kept halting and looking back? It appeared to be a middle-aged, slender, round-shouldered man, and when he turned his head John saw that his face was gentle and kindly, his smile wistful, a little sad.

It was James Merrick! Not the Merrick of later years, but the lonely man who had gone to an orphan asylum for a little boy who would bear his name.

Then, indeed, a sobbing, gasping breath tore its way from John's throat, and on the instant the strange company ahead vanished, and he walked alone upon the road. How tired he was! How sleepy! He passed his hand across his eyes in a last effort at wakefulness, but his dragging feet refused to carry him further and slowly he sank down on ground that wasn't hard any more, but yielding like a luxurious bed.

How good it was to rest! John sighed deeply, gratefully, without pain, and smiled a little faintly. He would be better in the morning, and Rose would come for him, they would go on forever.

The wind fluttered the tattered garments of that bundle lying there, but not for long, for the snow flakes, crisp with frost, settled in the folds and creases and gradually enveloped the still figure as if to hide it in pity from the world, rising in a mound beneath which John Merrick slept on.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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JUNGLE WIND

YOU seem to make me feel a strong, warm wind
That comes from out a jungle, lit with bloom,
Whose strange, exotic fragrance can assume
The lure of every sinner that has sinned
Since first when Time her rosy minutes spinned
And wove them in a never-ceasing loom
To level those of us who might presume
To feel immune to passions, glamour-dinned!

So take your incantations from my reach
And let the crystal coldness cut me low,
Unmindful of the things that you beseech,
And filled with great relief to have you go,
Because there'd come a time when you would teach
That jungle winds were only made to blow!

Sonia Ruthèle Novák.

Partnership

By RUTH ROBINSON BLODGETT

"PERHAPS you'd better leave us your report, Tyler, and go!" Thus old Collamore, the chairman, had dismissed George Tyler from the directors' meeting of the Mogul Range Copper Company.

But not before George had caught certain significant words spoken by old Collamore. "It 'll depend a lot on the new general manager of this reorganized company. I don't want any of these highly specialized engineers, who don't understand the financial end—how difficult it may be for our banking house to handle all these new securities right now."

And that remark had fostered a lurking, only half-admitted hope in George's heart, so that it had beaten roughly against his coat all the way to the station.

Then he shoved it out of his mind, thinking only, as he telegraphed Adele, how glad he was that now he could get home in time to help her trim the Christmas tree and fill the stockings.

The five o'clock train for Boston cut its way up, out of the Grand Central tunnel, into the zero weather. But the warm chair car was kindled with the ever-renewing spirit of Christmas. It electrified the eyes of the weary, home-going business men.

George slipped out of his overcoat, and lifted an awkwardly wrapped bundle to the rack. "Mam-ma!" came, clearly enunciated, from the wrappings. He jumped. So did the near-by passengers.

And then they all laughed.

"Pretty near forgot I had a baby. Lucky they keep a toy shop in the terminal." He spoke casually to an elderly man across the aisle.

"Christmas keeps us from taking our blessings too much for granted, doesn't it?"

At which exchange of pleasantries they both shrouded themselves in their newspapers.

George Tyler was just foolish enough at that moment to be proud that these people knew he was a father. He almost felt inclined to lean over, and say to that man across the aisle: "I not only have a baby.

I have two fine boys, too." But he didn't. He kept on reading.

How Christmas did soften a man up—give him a chance to relax into tender, intimate thoughts—quite foreign to mining reports, smoke-laden conference rooms, vicious, endless arguing, arguing—

The cold had already frosted the outer panes, shutting off the flying, dusky world. And again he pushed the memory of that directors' meeting back into its own mental pigeonhole and let his hand drop limply over the chair arm.

George Tyler had that sort of mind—pigeonholes! Mutually exclusively compartments with strong partitions—one for business, one for diversion—which meant his wife and children! He always boasted of his ability to slip off one rôle—as he had his overcoat right now—and slip on another.

He had boasted about it to Adele when they were first married—she, a dainty elf of a girl with shocked hair, perched on the arm of his chair. When he looked at her, such an elusive, fragile sprite, at first he had been filled with reverent awe that she was his to cherish. And then he had thrilled at his great physical strength, which enabled him to stand between her and the rough things of life.

Her mother had always sheltered her that way.

"I want you to explain every single thing about business to me, Georgie Porgie." She had an impish way, in those days, of ruffling his cowlick in the wrong direction.

"See her, Puss, nothing doing! In this little partnership, we're going in for specialization—division of labor! Me for the sordid figures! You for the home decoration! When I come home I want to forget business and play."

"Not figures, Porge! But about the mines. Tell me about the white rats in them. I want to go down in one some time."

George, at that time, had just returned from his first appraising expedition to the copper country of northern Michigan. Collamore and Gage, dealers in investment securities, and fast becoming copper kings—old Collamore was, even then, president of the Mogul Range Copper Company—suddenly discovered that George Tyler knew mineralogy and engineering. So they took him off the Stock Exchange.

George had looked at Adele's ridiculously small beaded slippers sticking straight up on his knee, and laughed paternally. "Down in a mine? Why, this little cat would run from a mouse. When it comes to mine rats, let George do it!"

What a real man her daintiness made him feel!

"It's getting kind of thin, Georgie," she said irrelevantly. She was running her fingers up the paths over his temples.

"Well, when I'm bald, perhaps your mother will think I'm old enough to trust me to take care of you!"

"Silly!"

She rolled off the arm of the chair into his lap, and he tickled her back of the ear.

As he sat here in the chair car now, the radiator was sizzling, sputtering at his feet. He was glad to feel it there, so comfortingly warm. Drowsily, he wandered among vagaries of memory—the exquisite thrills of those early married days, the wonder of his first-born—Christmas brought it all back.

The sizzling got fainter, fainter—stopped.

Now he was conscious of the whizz of the wheels on the cold steel rails!

George was quite bald now. There was no cowlick for Adele to ruffle. And she no longer asked about mines.

Sometimes he wished she would. Tonight now, while they were trimming the tree, he'd like to talk this deal over with her—how he had been investigating Castle Mine, just about to go fluey, and got the first option on it for the Mogul Range Company! It was a feather in his cap with old Collamore—the whole thing as good as any adventure story—and full of possibilities. But probably she wouldn't understand.

She seemed satisfied with her own division of labor nowadays.

Gee! He was weary!

He let the magazine slip from his fingers, and rested a cheek on his knuckles. And then he must have dozed off.

The train, leaving New Haven, jerked

him forward, cracked his neck. A Western Union boy was passing out of the far end of the car, a vague echo of the name he called just disturbing George's subconsciousness.

The cold, now stealing in around the sill, made him push his chair around. And he got up and went out to the dining car.

When he returned, he picked up the magazine again, tried to find his place in the adventure story he had started, gave it up and began over again. That everlasting business getting in between the lines again.

At last, he ceased to struggle—and began to review that meeting in detail—his findings and recommendations regarding the purchase of the bankrupt mine. If they should buy it, and reorganize the company, and take on a new general manager—

Then he thought of Adele—and braced himself.

Business was getting to be an octopus, shutting down over a man—eating him alive. Those directors back there in New York, what did Christmas Eve mean to them—except this chance to make more money! Their option on Castle Mine closed at nine o'clock to-morrow morning.

As for him, George reasoned with himself, it wasn't so much the money-making, but the love of achievement, the game of the thing—this new discovered gift of his for organization. Nevertheless, he was forced to acknowledge that there seemed to be only one pigeonhole. Business had broken down partitions, spilled over, smothering those tender, happy things of his early married life.

He shivered—as if some sweet, fragile thing that he had once owned, but had failed to nurture and grown careless of, had died.

Those evenings he had at home nowadays, he was always begging off some party. "Can't we get out of it, dear—just have a cozy time together? I didn't sleep a wink on that sleeper."

The cozy evening became wandering replies to Adele's valiantly begun, slowly diminishing attempts to drag him back into *her* interests. Finally a settling down to trite rejoinders over newspapers and books—and an early turning-in!

Adele was growing to have only one big pigeonhole, too. Her interests, in which he had so little share—children, parties, charities! Lately, they had been moving steadily apart, separated by a self-conscious pride—as if, in clearing their fields of action, they had piled between them the stone walls he was used to seeing on New Hampshire farms.

And yet he could recall an expectancy in her eyes—shy, almost frightened—looking for something that never came true. At such times he would curse himself for a fool, jump up, saying: "What do you say to a game of bridge, Adele, with—" some other couple in the neighborhood.

Generally she seemed satisfied with her limited sphere. She adored the children. There was always some stray bachelor, who would gladly take her to parties when *he* couldn't—and Mrs. Fletcher, his mother-in-law, living so conveniently near by at the Commonwealth Avenue Hotel, had kept right on sheltering her from care and worry.

"I'm not the proverbial mother-in-law!" She was the very handsome, pleasantly efficient type. "Am I, George? Speak up for me! Tell them I never butt in!"

"Butt in!" Too charming, tactful—thoughtful—for such a coarse phrase! So everlastingly thoughtful—that was it! A stop gap in every emergency—a new sun parlor, another servant, the use of her limousine. Sometimes he wondered if it weren't for her would he be so callous at having to leave home so much—so willing to let his responsibilities as a father slide. Mightn't Adele enter his interests more—be willing, if this chance came—

They were chugging into the Back Bay Station.

"A business that keeps the father of three away from his children on Christmas Eve is a hard taskmaster!" It was the same white-haired man across the aisle, who had risen, and was putting on his overcoat.

George jumped, the remark so rebuked his thoughts.

He laughingly agreed, and hauled down the doll from the rack. At which, the thought that he was a husband and father going home suffused him with the former

pleasant warmth. Probably Adele and her mother would meet him at the station—on their way home from hearing the carols on Beacon Hill.

But they were not there. Neither was the limousine. And, almost resentful at this indifference to his home-coming, he hurried out into the stillness of the raw, overcast night.

It was just then that a sedan drove up to the curb. And a man got out. A familiar face! Of course—the doctor Adele called for the children!

"Good evening!" he said, about to pass on.

But the man stood in his path.

A quickly spreading apprehension froze George's blood—and the unspoken question on his lips.

"I told Mrs. Tyler I would meet you." The doctor spoke with an unnatural evenness.

"You?" George hardly knew the man. "Why? What?" And then he wanted to put his fingers in his ears so that he need not hear.

"You did not get the telegram?"

"No!"

"Get in, Mr. Tyler!"

George obeyed dumbly, surprised to find that his paralyzed limbs could act.

"Your baby was very ill when we telegraphed."

"And—now? Not—"

"Yes! She died an hour ago. Acidosis!"

George's fingers closed convulsively over the squashy bundle of the doll. A nausea spread over him—as the car lurched over the rough ruts of the frozen snow. He caught sight of a face in the small mirror of the car. He looked at it dispassionately. It was an old, lined face—of a man who had lost something. Some one who belonged to him was dead.

And then a picture flashed—Adele crooning over a baby!

He was no longer a manikin. "My wife?"

"The child was ill only four hours. The shock has prostrated her. You can help—more than any one. She asked if I would go to meet you and tell you."

They were driving through the Fenway. Great banks of snow, covered with a concretelike crust, bordered the uneven road, gleamed in the flashes of the street lamps. It seemed to be on the ground for always. His house, a Georgian Colonial, a wedding present from Mrs. Fletcher, flashed before them—enormous, reelingly top-heavy, with its dark windows below, and lighted ones above.

"Good night, Mr. Tyler. I won't come in. If it is any satisfaction to you, you must know that everything possible was done. From the first the child was in the hands of a Greater Physician." The doctor spoke brokenly.

George looked at him with a detached feeling of sympathy—not seeming to realize that this loss was his—his own—thinking rather how much a doctor hates to lose a case—a child!

"It was good of you to come and get me, doctor!" The men gripped hands. And George was crunching his way over the squeaky snow to his front door, wondering if the house would suddenly lose its balance and fall on him.

His mother-in-law met him at the door—kissed him. Charm, tact were gone. He saw her old, let down, weeping, for the first time. The baby was named for her. For the first time some sense of reality pervaded him.

"Adele?"

"Upstairs, dear! In the hall!"

He had dropped his wraps and was covering the stairs, subconsciously aware of other weeping women about—servants—a neighbor!

Adele was lying limp on the couch in a farther recess of the hall, where a big window looked out across the Fenway. He picked her up—such a slender, frail form—so childish in a simple cotton dress. With a little moan, she pressed her hot, swollen face against his rough chin and settled into his arms, calling his name, over and over, crying like a frightened animal.

"Dearest! My little girl! My sweetheart!"

He sat down in a big chair, holding her tight—unable to say anything more, because of dry, salty lumps that choked. Awkwardly he patted her shoulder, ran his big

hand up and down her forearm, kissed her tangled hair.

The other people seemed to disappear. They were alone together.

"Oh, George, I'm so afraid—"

"I'm here, dear. I'm here—" It was the only sensation that he had—that he must pour his great strength into her. She gripped him, pressing the cords in his neck, until he felt actual pain. His limbs became stiff—lost their feeling of belonging to him.

Hours must have passed.

At last Adele whispered: "She didn't want to die! She fought to live!" She burst into violent weeping again. "We all fought, George!"

"I know, dear. I know!" He saw only his little wife going down in this terrible fight, and he not here to help! To draw a full breath became agony.

"Oh, why did she have to die?"

"Darling, I don't know!"

Why, indeed! Only fifteen months old, and gone. Where had she gone? The gray vastness of the Fenway beyond the windows stretched into icy, unfathomable eternity.

He had always believed, in a general way, that death was not the end of things. There were souls. They went on somewhere. When he had met death before—the inevitability of long life—he had accepted it vaguely, but unquestioningly. But a child—a promise unfulfilled. Out of the warmth of its mother's arms—into eternity? No loving God could do a thing like that!

His conception of God was as evanescent as the night. He had been satisfied to lean on his moral code, justice, fair play.

Now, as Adele became calmer, he felt his own strength slipping—as if he were a broken prop, on which it was not safe for her to lean her weight. And he, too, was afraid.

Looking down he saw that her eyelids had closed. "A little sleepy, dear?" She nodded. He took her into their room and covered her over. "I'll be right near by, darling!" he whispered, and returned to the hall.

Mrs. Fletcher was there. She had been, all the time—by the half open door of the guest room.

"Will you—look—at the baby, George?" Her eyes lifted to the door.

Fear became a sinister, real thing. And the dead child became—not a sorrow he was helping Adele to bear, but his own sorrow! His own child—dead! In there, just beyond that door!

"No, no! Not now! In the morning—with Adele, mother!"

He started toward the stairs, to get away. But he turned to say, "Will you lie down with Adele, mother—let me know if she wakes?" and plunged down into the darkness of the first floor.

On the landing there was a huddled mass—weeping. It was Annie, the children's nurse.

As he pressed the button to light the hall, he kicked something soft at his feet. The doll, its wrapping half off, stared up at him. He picked it up, and placed it, with its feet together, on the stiff hall chair.

The girl's weeping seemed to fill the dreary silence of the house. How could she cry that way? He felt no desire to cry at all. He felt just—empty.

Then, in a sort of alert stupor, he began to tramp around the chain of rooms. Living room, sun parlor, dining room—back to the hall, where the doll sat jeering at him with silly round eyes and vapid smile. So he turned and went the other way! Dining room, sun parlor, living room, hall—circling, circling, as if he were skating in a rink. Conscious of inconsequential details—beginning to watch for them! The flicker of the street lamp on the satin finish of the piano, the ogreish outline of the silver service on the sideboard, the spooky hall clock—ticking, ticking!

The house was cold. There was always the grayness of the unlighted snow beyond the windows. And always, mixed with the ticking of the hall clock, came the sound of Annie weeping. What right had that girl to cry for something that was his?

For a long time he stood still—in the sun parlor, by a bird cage, shrouded with its white cloth for the night. Then it came to him that this English servant had known his little girl better than he had. In a new hysteria he rattled the coins in his pocket. His memory was blank. He could

remember nothing—either what the child had looked like, or what she had ever said or done.

The night was like a black abyss. He swayed on the rim.

Some one, finally, came up behind him, and spoke to him.

It was Annie again. "I thought, since you didn't go to bed, sir, and it was cold, I'd warm some bouillon for you. I've put it in the library where it's snugger. You may not want it, sir, but it helps to have something to do."

He turned around.

Her confidence grew. "I went in to look at her again, and she was lying there so peaceful, it was just like she'd dropped off for her nap, and I could steal away and do something. You know, sir, I always had to watch till she dropped off, she was so apt to get right up on her feet."

With inarticulate gratitude, he was leaving the ghostlike window and following her. He was grateful for the soup, and more grateful for companionship—even with this homely girl. It had drawn him back from a gulf of despair.

As he drank the soup, he looked at Annie, lingering in the door. Wisps of thin hair stuck out from her head. Her naturally heavy features were sodden and twisted. She was running her hand back and forth over the plush of the portière, as if she wanted to say something more.

He set down the cup. "Thank you, Annie. It tasted better than I thought it could."

Then he, too, wanted to talk with some one. "You had to do so many little things—for her, I suppose you grew awfully fond of her."

Annie sniffed, swallowed.

"Why don't you sit down? Tell me about her."

"She was such a lovely baby—so good from the day she was born!"

"You and I were sitting on the stairs, weren't we, that night? And then a little cry came, and you jumped up and said: 'It sounds like a girl, Mr. Tyler!'"

"And when the nurse said it was, you told me to go open a bottle of light wine—that you and the doctor'd celebrate—you were so glad to have something to tie ribbons on. Those were your words, sir!"

"She *was* a cunning thing—nice and pink, with eyes buried deep in fat little cheeks—like her mother's—"

"Like velvet to touch, sir. When I bathed her—"

Leaning forward, eagerly, he broke in: "The touch of a baby always gets you, doesn't it, Annie?"

Annie had sat down on the edge of a chair and stopped crying.

"I can remember," he continued, "how it would make something run all through me to feel her fat little fingers shut over my thumb. A baby's hand is so perfect—a miracle. She was a strong little tike." He was watching his own big hands folding and unfolding.

"And smart, too, sir! Only last Thursday, when Mrs. Tyler was looking for you, and your telegram came saying you'd have to go to New York, she'd been running around on all fours—"

"I remember—just like a funny badger—but quick as lightning."

"And all of a sudden, sir, up she gets on her two feet, and walks off, big as life, screaming 'Da-da'!"

"She said that—called me?"

"She always took to you, sir. You didn't frighten her, making a fuss over her—like most folks."

He did not speak for some time. At last Annie broke the silence. "I can't seem to make it right, her being a little angel up there so far away. I suppose they need little angels as well as big ones."

"You—believe—in things—like that? Angels?"

"Oh, yes! Don't you, sir?"

He got up impatiently. The bizarre idea crowded in between him and the vivid picture of his child. "Oh, I don't know. I don't know what—I think!" He had crossed to the mantel.

It was then that he saw the boys' stockings for the first time, hung on a crazy, uncertain string across the fireplace. And apples and sugar lumps on the mantel—eight of them—one for each of the reindeer!

"Dasher, Dancer, Prancer and Vixen,

Cupid, Comet, Donder and Blitzen!" He counted them off mechanically. "I'd forgotten! To-morrow's—to-day's Christmas!"

"I've been looking at them, sir! Poor little fellers! They must have come down and done it all themselves."

"It isn't right to spoil their faith in Santa Claus. It can't be wrong for us to make a little Christmas—for *them*." Weariness dropped away. "Do you know, Annie, where Mrs. Tyler hid the things?"

Annie, herself, had hidden them in the hall closet. They dragged them out.

"As you said, it helps to have something to do." He was standing on a chair, tying up the big red Santa, which topped every Christmas tree. Annie handed up tinsel, balls, toys—old friends used year after year. He worked feverishly. And this preparing a Christmas for his boys became a symbolical act—a rededication of himself to his family.

"When I was a kid," he explained, "something spoiled Christmas one year. I can remember it better than all the others." They were filling the stockings and taking down the apples and sugar. He stopped when he came to the arranging of an electric train. It did not seem as if he could—

"They've been yelling up the chimney for it every night, Mr. Tyler!" And so, with sore knees and aching shoulders, they worked resolutely for an hour, putting it together. "I'll show you how it runs, Annie. See! You press this!" The train started around the curved track.

At which Annie began to cry again. "I don't feel she's up there in the sky, at all. It's just as if she were close by, laughing and crowing to see it go!"

He wanted to say something more to Annie. She was no longer a servant, but a comrade, who had helped him perform a sacred rite. "I'll always be glad you were the one who took care of her, Annie," he muttered.

Just then the doorbell rang. It came as a dissonant clang from the outside world. And the yellow telegram, which Annie handed him, seemed lurid mockery. For he knew at once that it was Business elbowing its way into the sanctity of his home.

He opened the message, read mechanically:

> Have decided to buy Castle Mine. Want you as partner of Collamore and Gage to take management of reorganized company. Will mean residence in Michigan for next few years. (Signed) HORACE COLLAMORE.

An old thrill started up, fluttered feeble wings and dropped dead.

He went at once to the telephone and sent a return wire—an emphatic refusal of the offer. The incident clinched his new feeling of usefulness to his family, and his restored faith.

"Go and get a nap, Annie!" he said, turning from the telephone.

They went upstairs.

In the window of the upper hall was the first suggestion of dawn. It drew him over there. Morning was creeping across the park, giving shape to the snow-covered trees, making them like a white mountain range, partly hidden by a mist. And the light, moving over the landscape, became for him something more than the dawn.

Once more he was afraid! Afraid to stay—more afraid to move away! So he stood there, his forehead pressed against the sill.

Once, when he was a quite big, little boy, up in New Hampshire, and something had happened which hurt him very much inside, he had cried, unashamed that his mother saw him. "George, look up!" And she had pointed to old Chocorua, red and purple in the summer evening. "Trials are like that! If we aren't afraid to look up, some day we can look back on them, as mountain peaks at sunset."

"Or snow-covered trees at dawn!" he murmured, standing there.

The strain to understand all things slipped away.

He lay down on the couch, outside Adele's door, and immediately fell asleep.

When the sun, shining across his face, awoke him, it seemed quite natural, and a part of his dream, that Adele should be sitting there on the couch beside him. Her back was to the window. The sun shining through her loose hair made a white circle about her head, and caught the sheen of the blue satin robe she was wearing. He

lay there a few seconds, only half awake, thinking of some picture he had seen in an art gallery, where a woman in blue floated among clouds.

She leaned her head against him. He buried his face in the thick curls. The touch, the smell intoxicated him. He was glad—glad to have been able to prove to her that something was more precious to him than achievement.

At last he felt he must say something—tell her what had come to him last night. "Adele, darling!" His voice had a harsh, grating sound. "She—little Jean—" He tried again. "The boys will have to grow up, but she must always be our baby."

Her fingers closed over his thumb.

He twisted and looked down. A stoical calm was on her face.

"George, dear, what you did last night—it helps me to see—" She drew in her under lip and pressed it with her teeth. "To see that a dear little baby must not leave—just a shadow behind."

It was his turn to press her hand.

Then he noticed that in her other hand she crushed a yellow paper. Now her voice became very matter of fact. "I picked this up from the floor here, George, where you dropped it. Annie says you sent a wire. We can't talk about it—discuss it now. We mustn't, dear. But I want you to know I asked her to send another—for me—asking Mr. Collamore to give you time—more time to consider it. That's all, dear." Her head dropped against his breast.

"But Adele—"

"I know. You wanted to make the sacrifice for us. Oh, Porge darling, it doesn't seem as if I ever knew you until last night. But don't you understand—we've got to go—out there—where we won't be separated—where we can work together, share things. After last night—"

"My dearest, don't—we won't—talk about that now." Long pent up tears had started to his eyes. He buried his face in her lap.

The sun, striking the banks of snow outside, broke into a thousand twinkling little suns. From the hall below came the shrill voices of children.

Adele rubbed her hand gently across the spot where the cowlick had been. "It's even harder for you, Porge dear, because you did not know her as well as I."

He sat up and wiped his eyes. The door to the guest room was still a little ajar. It no longer filled him with dread. The baby had become a living spiritual bond between Adele and him.

"Come!" he said, taking her hand. They went in to look at their dead child.

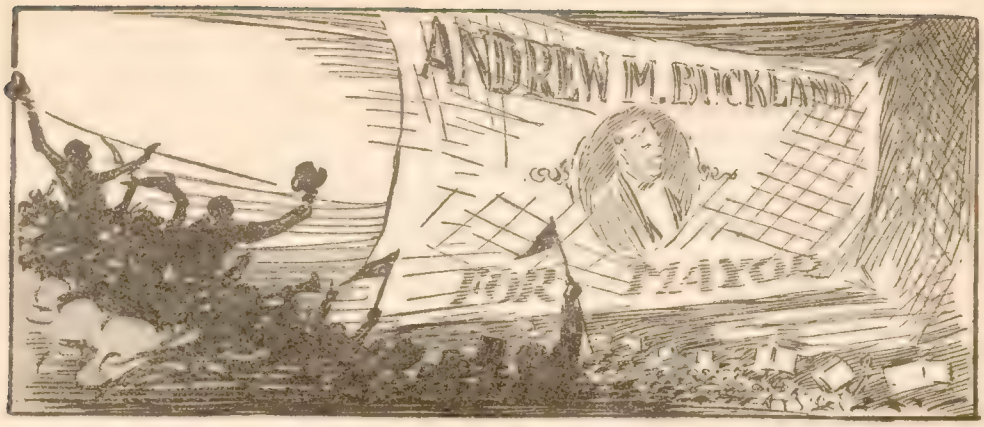
THE END

THE BUBBLE

I BLEW a bubble into the air,
A world afire!
Soaring, bright with the bloom of spring,
Reflecting the earth as a little thing,
Gay as a maiden's dream desire,
Higher and higher
It rose, on its unseen wing!

You claim that it burst? Ah, you are blind!
Drops of the dawn
Fell from it then, mad witchery,
Casting enchantment down to me!
Water and soap in my world afire
Are all that you find?
Were there no fairies where you were born,
Poor, walled-in mind?

Theda Kenyon.



Money in Bundles.

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Unbeatable Bates," "The Comedy of Terrors," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PINCH HITTER.

THE business of the Cash-and-Carry Express service remained totally inoperative for twelve hours after the revoking of the licenses of drivers and machines. The office in North Square was closed at six o'clock in the evening, but Miss Cahill remained at the telephone desk until midnight, explaining to all persons who called for service that the business was suspended until Mr. Buckland could find means to defend himself against the attacks of the political system.

Miss Cahill was an ardent partisan of her employer, and her spirited answers to inquiries enlisted not a little support from customers. Many of the latter assured her that they would not employ the rival service under such conditions and expressed bitter disgust toward the ruling powers of the city.

Meanwhile, Andrew Buckland got his second wind and renewed courage after his talk with Josephine, and he went out in the evening and rounded up his idle employees for a council of war. He expected that further hostilities would meet any positive tactics that he might employ, but knew that a good general would certainly develop the enemy strength before deciding to withdraw from action. It remained for the mayor to call on the city's bureau of licenses to revoke the trucking licenses of the Cash-and-Carry service, and he was quite capable of inventing some ridiculous charge upon which to base such procedure; but that situation could not be met until it was developed.

Andrew's business had lately grown to an equipment of three trucks, ten delivery motorcycles, and a dozen passenger sidecars. And at eight o'clock on the morning after his conference with the employees fourteen of his drivers were patroling the streets on bicycles, and the trucking business was being handled by a half dozen horse-drawn wagons.

The success of the alliance with the Linden Tree Inn was attested by the storm of impatient calls from customers who de-

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sired breakfasts and luncheons delivered, and this made it necessary for Andrew to draw on all the ancient livery stables in town for horses and wagons. A hurried tour of such stables resulted in the appearance of a total of nine delivery wagons of good appearance, and these were manned by the khaki-clad chauffeurs and decorated with placards to identify them with the Cash-and-Carry service.

Miss Cahill telephoned promptly to all regular customers and announced a resumption of the service in modified form; and this quick recovery was hailed with delighted applause. Citizens stopped upon street corners and discussed the admirable fighting spirit of the mild, gentle-mannered man who had started with the driving of a single wagon, and the next edition of the newspaper carried a short but daring tribute to the courage and resourcefulness of the man whom the politicians had driven to the wall, evidently written by an enthusiastic editor in open defiance of the advertising manager.

McInnes, the automobile dealer, was visited by Andrew on the second day, and he listened to his story with solemn respect and attention.

"I hesitated to come to you, Mr. McInnes," Andrew began, "for I'm much in your debt for past favors, but I'm making a desperate fight."

"It's a good fight!" said McInnes appreciatively. "I'm watching it."

"You know pretty well what I'm doing, then," Andrew went on. "Well, the thing that hurts me just now is that I can't get my passenger service going again. Folks aren't going to ride in horse-drawn buggies in these days when they can get taxicabs and the People's Service Company motorcycles. There's no substitute for my idle side-cars. I've no right to drag you into the scrap, but you still have money tied up in my business, and I can say truly that you are one of the few men that I can trust."

"What's your proposition?" McInnes inquired. "You've never found me a hard feller to convince."

"I want those side-cars on the streets," said Andrew earnestly. "I'll give you a bill of sale for the whole dozen—sell 'em back to you, you see—and the consideration will be the balance that I still owe you. If you're willing to take so much responsibility and trouble, you can hire the drivers that I'll find for you, and then take out licenses for taxi service in your name. You'll have to paint out my sign on the cars, and let it be known that you've started a taxi service of your own. Call it the McInnes Individual Taxi-Cycle Company.

"I don't want a thing out of it except satisfaction, and you may make some money. My object is to provide my old customers with the service and keep 'em from going to the People's Service Company cars.

"When it's all over," he continued, "that is, if I win my fight, I'll buy all the cycles back again. But if you make enough money to tempt you to keep on I'll buy a new outfit, and I'll be willing to have you for a competitor."

"I never thought of doing anything like that," McInnes said slowly, "but I don't see how I could refuse your proposition. I get the idea, and it's a good one; it 'll keep Ray's crowd from getting a monopoly. All right, Mr. Buckland, I'm with you. I've got a few political friends myself, and I'm pretty sure Mayor Yates and his bunch can't stop me from getting the licenses at any rate. We'll see what they try to do after that. I'm a pretty tough guy in a good fight, and I've been gettin' sort o' hot about this business the last few days. You get busy and dig up as many drivers for me as you can, and we'll show those fellers some action."

The plan was carried out and put in operation a few days later, and a report came to the ears of McInnes that Forrest Ray had threatened to put him out of business and out of town for daring to take part in the war.

McInnes was born of fighting stock, and the rumor interested him so much that he took pains to meet Ray in the street and ask him for a verification of it.

"Do you believe all the hot air that you hear?" Ray said flippantly. "No, Mr. McInnes, I never said that I'd do those

things to you; but that isn't saying that I couldn't if I wanted to. You haven't got the idea, have you, that I don't know all about your game? Those side-cars still belong to Andrew Buckland, and all you've done is to take his name off them. You must be a pretty good friend of his, but this business is going to cost you money.

"I've played a perfectly straight business game, and I've put old Buckland down and out, just as I told him I would. He's just about at the last gasp now. Business ain't done like it was when he thought he was doing well to make a thousand dollars a year in the grocery trade. We reckon by six figures now, or better, and a million is the target we're shooting at.

"Fellers that get in the way have to be brushed off. Old Buckland is all right, except that he's a little bit cracked, and I never bore him ill-will; but he had to be brushed out o' the way, that's all."

McInnes took hold of one of Ray's coat lapels with a large hand and looked into his pale-gray eyes intently.

"Looka here, Ray!" he said gutturally. "You put up your little fly swatter when I'm around. Don't go trying to brush me off the map. When you were a kid did you ever scoop up a yellerjacket in your bare hand, thinkin' it was a fly? Well, I'm sort of a yellerjacket myself, and I could burn up a feller like you if he tried to treat me like a fly."

"You're a rough guy, ain't you?" sneered Ray, and tried gently to disengage his coat from the other's grip.

"You've said it, me lad!" agreed McInnes. "I'm one of the roughest guys that your ma's little boy ever stacked up with. And I'm telling you something right now for your own good: if you try any of your brushin' off business on me, I probably won't bother about lawyers or anything like that, but I'll come right after you. You can talk better 'n any phonograph I ever saw, but I never did see a feller with a mouth like yours that could fight. I *can* fight, and if you want to take a vacation in the hospital you start something with me!"

"Cheap stuff! Cheap stuff!" grumbled Ray, a little soberly, as McInnes let go his coat. "But you've got me wrong, McInnes. You'll find that I'm on the level, and if you can do business as well as I can you have a chance to win out. I'm a business man, and I specialize in pep and efficiency; that's all the secret there is about it."

"Then see to it that you stick right to your books and pencils," said McInnes, and left him.

That same day two of McInnes's cycles were picked up for speeding, and the drivers were fined ten dollars each, but the red-jacket drivers of Ray's company continued to charge through the city streets recklessly without molestation.

One of them ran into a horse-drawn wagon that was delivering orders from the Linden Tree Inn, wrecked the wagon and its load, and caused a runaway. A city policeman arrested the driver of the wagon and accused him of careless driving and the obstruction of traffic, and Andrew Buckland paid the fine of fifteen dollars.

That night Andrew took the midnight train for the State capital, and early next morning he presented himself at the office of the State commissioner of motor vehicles and obtained an audience.

"Mr. Sanford," he said to the commissioner, "I am the man that owns the trucks and motorcycles of which you canceled the licenses last week."

"Oh, yes," said the commissioner, recalling the incident. "Well, Mr. Buckland, I'm afraid I can't do anything for you in that matter. You should have been more careful, you know. You have rather a bad reputation as an old offender."

"I came down here to tell you that you're aiding and abetting a political ring in our city by listening to their stories and acting on their suggestions. I'm not an old offender, and I'll venture to say that not one out of ten of the convictions secured against my drivers has been a just one."

"I can't take time to listen to grievances of that sort," said Sanford. "You fellows are always howling about injustice. You are making pretty strong statements, too, and you'd better be careful you don't get into worse trouble."

"I'm going to make the same statements in the Supreme Court, if it's necessary," Andrew declared. "I came here, not to plead with you, but to give you a chance to correct the mistakes of your department, sir. I intend to make a test case as soon as I have the opportunity, and while my funds hold out I'll carry the fight as high as it may have to go. Our city is rotten to the core just now, and there's no justice there, but I believe there are courts in which I may get a fair hearing—that's all I want."

"There's always some mess of this sort to bother with," said the commissioner testily; but he looked Andrew over appraisingly. "What do you expect me to do, Mr. Buckland? My work is spread all over this great State, and I can't be in two places at once."

"You ought to know what you should do, sir," replied Andrew coldly. "If you haven't some way of learning conditions in places under your jurisdiction, it seems to me that the system should be reorganized."

"I'll do what I can to find out about this business," said the official after deep reflection. "If your grievances are well founded, I hope you'll get satisfaction. Give me a little time, and I'll see what I can do. Yes, I'll see what I can do."

Andrew returned at once to the seat of war, but with little assurance that his mission had been in any way successful. On the following day, however, he noted with eager interest the presence of two State troopers in the city, capable-looking men whom he had never seen there before.

A few hours later the report was circulated in the city that a trooper had arrested one of Ray's red-jackets for exceeding the speed limit by ten miles an hour, and that in the traffic court the trooper failed to secure a conviction, but received a stern rebuke from the magistrate.

Andrew fairly bristled with excitement, and his hopeful suspicions were strengthened when he heard a little later that two more arrests had been made and that the magistrate persisted in dismissing the cases.

In the evening a stranger, wearing somewhat shabby corduroy clothes, with cap and leggings, called at Andrew's apartment and talked with him privately for a half hour. Then Andrew accompanied him to the street, and found there one of the side-cars that McInnes was using for passenger service. He entered the side-car, and the stranger drove him down town and along the principal streets in the glare of electric lights. Presently they turned toward the railroad station, and while passing across the station plaza at a legal rate of speed they were halted by a city policeman.

"It's you I want to talk to!" said the policeman to Andrew. "Where's your license?"

"The driver has his license, I suppose," Andrew answered. "I'm merely a passenger."

"I guess that machine belongs to you now as much as it ever did," the policeman said sternly. "You're in company with McInnes, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not," was the curt answer. "But what right have you, officer, to hold me up and ask me these questions."

"We've all got an eye on you," the man announced frankly. "And I'm going to take you to the station, anyhow. You've been beating the limit: the cop at North Square phoned down here to the station and tipped me off that you are taking chances again."

"Very well; I'll talk with the magistrate about it."

"You bet you will!"

They ran the cycle slowly to the police station, with the officer walking beside them, and there the name of the man in the corduroy suit was entered on the blotter under the charge of speeding. The magistrate was sitting in the night traffic court, and they went before him at once.

"Hello! You here again, Buckland?" the magistrate exclaimed. "I thought we had you put away for a while. What's the trouble now?"

Andrew nodded toward the policeman and remained silent; and the policeman proceeded to enter his complaint against the driver.

"Twenty-five dollars!" exclaimed the magistrate with a bored air. "You're a new man, I guess; but you're working for old trouble-makers, and they don't mind paying fines."

"But I wasn't exceeding the speed limit," protested the driver quietly. "I haven't even touched the legal limit since I arrived in this town. And you haven't given me a chance to tell my side of the story."

"Pay the fine and get out!" ordered the man on the bench savagely.

"I'll pay the fine," said the stranger, "because I have been instructed to do that, but—you don't care much about retaining your seat on the bench, do you?"

"Who—what the— Say, what kind of a line are you giving me?" gasped the magistrate uneasily.

"You never saw me up here before," answered the man, "but you've heard my name, perhaps. I'm Strout, the deputy State commissioner. Sanford sent me up here to look you fellows over. I'm taking the midnight train back, because I've got more information already than I need."

"It's a frame-up!" cried the magistrate. "They've been stuffing you, Mr. Strout. But go ahead and make your report; I'll have something to say when the time comes."

"I doubt that," returned the deputy commissioner. "It 'll be just about your time for disappearing."

He handed the court attendant the money for the fine, bowed to the magistrate with an irritating grin, and walked out of the room with Andrew.

CHAPTER XX.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

HIGH officials in the State service do not make a practice of spreading themselves in graceful amenities when correcting official errors, and Andrew was satisfied and well pleased with the result of his efforts when an order from the commissioner restored his privileges as an owner of motor vehicles and granted new licenses to his drivers.

The magistrate who sat in the traffic court suddenly resigned his office on the plea of ill health, but beyond that nothing startling occurred as a result of the deputy commissioner's visit to the city. It was noteworthy, however, that when Andrew's chauffeurs resumed their duties as pilots of motor vehicles they were permitted to drive freely about the city without molestation from the police.

A week passed uneventfully, and then one of the red-jackets of Ray's company was arrested for speeding and fined twenty-five dollars. Ray himself appeared in the traffic court, refused to pay the fine, denounced the driver as a menace to public safety, and discharged him from his employ.

The newspapers reported the episode with favorable comments, and quoted Ray as saying that he was determined to have no deliberate violators of the law employed in his service.

Two more red-jackets were arrested and given the same summary treatment, and then Mr. Ray apparently felt constrained to burst into print with a general statement of his personal attitude toward persons who were indifferent to the established laws. "An open letter," he called the literary effort, and addressed it to the editor of the paper and to his fellow citizens. It read:

> It has been brought to my notice that certain persons who are not my well wishers have circulated reports to the effect that the People's Service Company has enjoyed special privileges which have been denied to certain rival business organizations.
>
> As the general manager of the People's Service Company, I wish to state that my own business principles are on the square, and I believe in the old motto: "Live and let live." If the drivers employed by my company have at times violated the law and escaped the penalties rightfully coming to them, it has been without my knowledge, and no one regrets it more than I do. In future it will be a rule of the People's Service Company that no employee found guilty of a violation of the law can remain in its service.
>
> While this letter is not written for political reasons, it is a well known fact that I am the chosen candidate of the People's Party for the office of mayor of this city, and I wish to announce that if I am elected to that high office I shall devote myself to the honest administration of the affairs of this fair city, and to the strict enforcement of all laws.
>
> Yours for a square deal for every man,
>
> FORREST ADOLPHUS RAY.

"The funniest thing about that is that a lot of the voters will just about shed tears

over it," said Andrew, reading his paper at the breakfast table; "and a good many people will feel obliged to patronize the People's Service Company because the general manager is such a conscientious, high-minded gentleman."

"But how can any political party nominate a man like that?" queried Josephine. "And how could he ever be elected?"

"Mayor Yates was nominated and elected twice," said her father, "and I can't say that he's superior in character or education to Forrest Ray. The so-called People's Party selects men with elastic consciences, who will live up to their secret pledges to get all they can from the people, through the people, and in spite of the people. But we should be thankful for small things, and it looks as though Ray might lead an exemplary life from now until after election. We'll have quite a rest, and I ought to be able to devote some time to the development of the business during the truce."

"I'm tired of doing nothing but keep house in this little toy apartment," Josephine complained ruefully. "You know I'd rather work for you than any one else, but you've got to hurry up and find the job for me."

"Aren't you acting as my private secretary?" laughed Andrew. "You surely don't want to have me fire Miss Cahill, and I can't open the first branch office until the business picks up a little more. Ray might even lay off long enough for me to make some money, and you know that I'd like to have you play the fine lady. You must get out and try to have a good time, same as you did last night. How was the show?"

"Not bad," she said indifferently.

"Mr. Kendall looked to me like a mighty gallant escort," Andrew remarked slyly. "You know I'm not inquisitive, Jo, but where did you find that young man?"

"Mr. Kendall hasn't been in town long," she said a little self-consciously. "He called on me two or three months ago with a note of introduction from his sister. I knew her in college."

"Well, he makes a good appearance, doesn't he? And it looks to me as though he was sort o' devoted. You know me, Jo; I'm not mounting guard over you like a watch dog; but that's the third evening at the theater in about two weeks, and it's been church every Sunday lately. You look out, or Viola will be coming around to ask about the young man's intentions."

"He's a very agreeable, presentable, and quite innocuous young man," said the girl, but blushed in spite of herself. "As for his intentions, I haven't the slightest interest in the matter. My own intentions are directed toward a self-supporting and dignified spinsterhood, if you please."

"That's not uncommon in the years from eighteen to twenty one," her father observed. "The young men are sworn bachelors, and the girls want nothing but single blessedness with a black cat and a singing canary bird. But they begin to get scared about the twenty-fifth birthday, the girls do, and there doesn't seem to be such a mob of presentable young men as there was before."

"You're the only really presentable young man I know at present," she declared, "and I think I shall go on keeping house for you as long as I am satisfactory."

Late that afternoon Andrew called on Judge Theodore Challands in his chambers and was received with the cordiality of strong and abiding friendship.

"We're both too busy, Andrew," said the judge, when they were seated: "I never see you or hear much about you now, since Josephine denied us the sunlight of her presence here. Of course, I have kept myself informed about your fight with Ray, and it was a relief to hear that you had been victorious. Now the fellow is experiencing an ante-election change of heart and is very virtuous, but I hope you'll be too strongly intrenched to suffer from his attacks in future.

"How is Josephine?" he asked eagerly. "You know, her resignation was a blow to us. But all I could do, Andrew, was to ask her to reconsider it, knowing only too well that she would not. It was a wretched affair, too terribly delicate to be handled by any persons involved in it. Frankly, I'll never forgive that fellow Carthew for his mischief-making, and I'm so vindictive that I'd enjoy seeing him disbarred to-morrow.

"By the way, there's a young man com-

ing into our offices to read law with us," he went on. "His name is Kendall, and he's a prepossessing young chap. You mustn't feel offended, Andrew, but it's largely on Josephine's account that we're taking him in. Edward has known the man for some time, and he learned a while ago that he was paying marked attention to Miss Jo, and apparently with her warm approbation. His prospects have been rather negligible. He's been working for the City Light and Power Company as a clerk; so we talked him over and decided to take him in and make a lawyer of him, so that he would have a fairer chance to make good in the event of Josephine's casting a seriously favorably eye upon him. He is a member of Edward's fraternity, and his record is good."

"That's like you, judge—and like your son, too," Andrew said feelingly. "I like the looks of Mr. Kendall, but I'm not well acquainted with him. Josephine seems to find him entertaining, but fathers don't know very much about their daughters' affairs anyway."

"Of course you won't tell her I mentioned him," the judge suggested. "That would ruin the young man's chances beyond repair. And now I want to ask you about your motorcycle passenger service. McInnes still has the cars, hasn't he? I've been curious about it."

"It happens to be one of the things that have brought me here this afternoon," Andrew answered a little nervously. "I'm taking a reckless plunge into big business, judge: I'm getting my business incorporated—intrenching myself, you see, against the future attacks of Ray and his crowd. Mr. Surelle, of the Linden Tree Inn, is going to be one of the principal stockholders."

"An excellent and reliable man!" interrupted the judge.

"Then McInnes is coming in with me. He's been a good friend to me, and he's willing to come in and look after the equipment end of the business. He wanted to return my motorcycles to me long ago, and said he had made enough money on them to pay him for his trouble, but I felt that I wanted him with me, so we're going to join forces. Mr. Forbes of the Mechanics Bank has agreed to be the treasurer, and he sees a considerable future for the business. He thinks it has developed with remarkable rapidity."

"He's a conservative business man," observed the judge, "and a bank president is a handy man to have along. You are going to be the president and the guiding spirit, I hope."

"I hope not," Andrew declared earnestly. "I came to ask you frankly if you would be the president. I am acceptable to the others as vice president and general manager, but we all hope that you may be the head of the company."

"You needn't speak so apologetically," said the other, with a smile. "I'm very much gratified. I shall have to consider the proposal, of course, but the invitation is very agreeable to me. Why can't you ask Miss Josephine to excuse you from dinner, and you and I will have dinner at the City Club, and talk the thing over."

Andrew assented happily, and the two men walked over to the majestically luxurious old club, the rendezvous of the well-to-do and conservative gentlemen of the town.

They dined and talked, and as the dinner hour wore on the club began to fill up with members in unwonted numbers. The judge called a servant and inquired the reason.

"A political meeting, sir," was the reply. "The gentlemen are coming to discuss the city election, and Mr. Medway, of the City National Bank, is going to speak to them about Mr. Ray, the candidate of the People's Party."

"I'm afraid that this is no place for me," said Andrew, on hearing the information.

"Oh, let's stay and hear what Julius has to say," proposed the judge. "He's not an orator, or a particularly original thinker, but he may have a message for us."

The crowd in the large clubhouse grew until the halls were filled with business and professional men who were as vitally interested in the political situation as good citizens should be, and at eight o'clock Julius Medway arrived, costumed like a senator in an ancient frock coat and a top hat.

The club's president introduced him to

the meeting, and he proceeded to tell the best men of the community why they should cast their ballots for Forrest Adolphus Ray.

Ray was, he said, a typical man of the people—self-educated, plain, rough and ready, ambitious, and untiring in his energy. He would administer the affairs of the city as a business man would conduct a large business, and under his supervision the city would grow and prosper, as all business enterprises with which Ray had been connected had grown and prospered.

He went somewhat discreetly into the details of Ray's business experience, touching lightly on certain striking features, and skipping others altogether.

"Forrest Ray," he shouted, in an effort to rouse himself to a higher pitch, "will make this city a place for progress and progressive men. He has ideas, gentlemen, and we need ideas in these times. He believes that a municipality should exercise control over many of our public utilities.

"This town, in the opinion of Mr. Ray, is still laboring under the delusion that it is a small town, whereas it has outgrown the swaddling clothes with which it is still hampered. Ray will teach it to walk. He advocates—as you will hear in his campaign speeches—the granting of charters to worthy public utilities, that the unworthy ones may be eliminated. He would have the street railways incorporated under a charter and united under one head, to eliminate the present confusion of competition and rivalry.

"You gentlemen of the City Club know well that we have just had under observation a pretty war between the drivers of rival lines of motorcycles. The owners of those lines did not, of course, take part in the disorder, but the city suffered from such violent competition. If we need this parcel express and passenger service, we need it developed to its best in every detail, and the granting of a charter to the most efficient and worthy company would immediately bring about the desired results."

"Can you tell us which company Mr. Ray would be inclined to favor?" called out a member in the center of the hall, and there was a burst of appreciative laughter from the entire audience.

Julius Medway's rather plethoric countenance flushed to a darker hue.

"It has nothing to do with the case, that Mr. Ray is at the head of such a company," he returned impatiently. "That is a circumstance which cannot be avoided. But, gentlemen, if Mr. Ray's company happened to be the best one in all respects, what would you have him do? Surely he could not be expected to show favor to an inferior service."

Andrew turned to Judge Challands beside him, and was astonished to find the jurist pale with indignation.

The judge rose suddenly from his chair in the middle of the assemblage and spoke.

"As one of the older members of this club," he said, "I am amazed that Mr. Medway—well known to us, and knowing us well—should have the effrontery to bring such a message to intelligent men.

"I know, and many of my fellow members know, that the man whom he is supporting in the present campaign is not qualified to hold public office. Forrest Ray is a bombastic, impudent upstart who has made an impression upon certain of his business associates with the sheer force of his flippancy and insolence. He is a man of limited education and low instincts. He is—"

"Judge Challands, you are making distinctly libelous statements, sir," shouted Julius Medway from the low platform.

"I intend to make some more!" retorted the judge. "I have no fear of this Mr. Ray; he has always had the good sense to keep out of the way of his superiors. I say that he is a scoundrel, and it is well known by this time that he was guilty of criminal acts in striving to put his business rivals out of his way. If this city has lost all respect for its early history and traditions, if it has yielded supinely to the forces of vice and corruption, then its citizens may elect this prancing jack-in-the-box to the highest municipal office.

"But!" he cried, in a trumpet voice, "I remember a night—twenty-four years ago—when the men of this club gathered in this very room to express their indignation over the political corruption that was rife in the city. That night they were moved by a common impulse to organize the Citizens'

Reform Party. As a result of the movement, General Thaddeus H. Underhill was elected mayor of the city, and under his administration we recovered our self esteem and the honor of the community.

"Gentlemen, if we have any spirit left, let us revive the Citizens' Reform Party here to-night, and save our city. When I took my seat upon the judicial bench, I resolved to avoid political entanglements, and I have never participated in a campaign since then. But now I am prepared to fight for the good name of my city, and I call upon you to join me.

"Very well! If the people have clamored for a business man, let them have one. But let him be a reputable business man, and that greatest novelty in our present political life, an honest man!

"Here beside me sits a modest, sincere business man; a man with high ideals, and a code of morals inherited from his fathers. I would put our standard in the hands of a man like Andrew M. Buckland—known to every one of you—and I would follow his lead and fight for victory."

"No, no! That's too much!" gasped the thunderstruck Andrew, half rising from his chair, and then sinking back in a vague attempt to efface himself.

But a great tumult of applause broke out and drowned all voices that tried to be articulate.

"Let Judge Challands take the chair!" shouted the president of the club during a momentary lull in the pandemonium. "Let us call a caucus here, and proceed to the nomination of Andrew Buckland!"

"Buckland! Buckland!" yelled the crowd, and Andrew Buckland saw a rolling sea of faces through a haze, and feared that his wits were deserting him.

CHAPTER XXI.

PERFECT UNDERSTANDING.

"IT was done," said Mrs. Medway, "upon a sudden and unaccountable impulse, of course, but it is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of. Andrew Buckland for mayor! It's inconceivable!"

"It gave Theodore Challands a chance to get off some of his sky-rocket oratory," Julius declared sourly.

"I'm utterly disgusted with the whole wretched business," asserted Faith Buckland. "You know I couldn't imagine Mr. Ray in such an office, but—to think of Henry's father—the old groceryman, as mayor of the second city in the State!"

"There's not a possibility of it," her mother assured her. "Your father has said already that a mere social club—even if it is the City Club, has no chance to figure as a factor in the election. Andrew Buckland and Josephine will plume their feathers and give themselves airs over the honor that has been thrust upon them, but the honor will remain in the nomination, you may be sure."

"It was blamed bad manners for Challands to get up and cut into my speech the way he did," Julius complained pathetically. "I hadn't finished, and I was going to let the members ask questions for me to answer. Challands spoiled the whole thing for me, and Ray is as sore as a pup about it. He bawled me out this morning for a straight half hour and said I'd better leave most of the campaigning to him."

"You're too spineless!—letting that man patronize you and bully you!" scolded his wife. "Doesn't he know that he owes everything he has to us? Beggar on horseback! He uses your money and your influence, and doesn't show any appreciation. We allowed Henry to be an alderman just to give some dignity to that wretched People's Party."

"If I'm spineless," said Julius darkly, beginning to turn, "it's mostly because I let two women henpeck me all the time. Are you and Faith running this campaign, or am I? It doesn't happen to be a social affair, and you'd better leave it to Ray and me; we understand each other perfectly."

Forrest Ray felt that he understood Julius perfectly, and he was highly displeased with him at the moment. Julius had "spilled the beans" at the City Club, he declared angrily, by bringing out the projected chartering of public utilities, and the beans were popping in the fire.

The nomination of Andrew Buckland had been an impromptu and utterly unexpected

movement, but already, the morning after, it was beginning to create a sensation in the city. A report of it had been carried straight from the City Club to a stormy meeting in the factory district, and one of the leaders of the foreign-born element had declared that a man of the type of Andrew Buckland would rescue the working people from the net of the People's Party in which they were entangled.

Ray went out in the streets on the following evening and harangued the populace from a motor truck, with a band playing patriotic airs, and Julius Medway sitting glumly on a chair in the truck, in the glory of his frock coat and top hat. Henry Buckland accompanied the party and essayed a speech as the candidate for the Fifth Ward, but he was inexperienced and timid, and the crowd howled him down.

Ray, however, could shout in a voice that soared above the howls of a mob, and his swinging arms and mobile, expressive face always gathered a following for him. He joked with the crowd until it was in better humor, and invited all citizens to a mass meeting for the next night to hear Mayor Yates tell what he thought of the man that was going to succeed him.

"Oh, yes, yes, I'm going to succeed him all right!" he yelled gleefully. "You people have said so, haven't you? You're the fellers that know. Some of the boys held a meeting last night down in Frog Hollow, and a loud-mouthed guy got 'em going all wrong. They tell me that they cheered when they heard that little old Andrew Buckland was going to run against me. Say! You fellers won't stand for anything like that, will you?"

The answering cries of "No! no!" were delivered as expected, but they were too feeble and scattered.

"They say that Andrew Buckland is *respectable!*" cried the orator. "I ask you, my friends, if a man is respectable—if he's honest and a square shooter, when he pulls the tricks in business that he has pulled on me—yours truly! They say I've got a criminal record! Ha, ha! That's good for a laugh, ain't it? I *have* got a criminal record, just because old Andy Buckland *framed* me, with the aid of our high-and-mighty district attorney who's got a crush on Andy Buckland's flapper daughter. Do you want a man for mayor who uses his daughter to get political pull?"

"Can all that stuff, Ray!" growled a man who was standing in the middle of the crowd. "Don't pull anything more like that, or I'll get up there and tell 'em all about you."

Ray scowled and stared down into the face of McInnes, the automobile dealer.

"The interruption comes from our respected fellow citizen, Mr. McInnes," he announced scornfully. "Mr. McInnes is the reputable automobile merchant who aided Andrew Buckland in evading the law when the state commissioner canceled all the motor licenses of Buckland. Mr. McInnes *bought* all the motorcycles—for a good cigar, I guess—and ran 'em under his own name, so's to defeat the forces of law and order. He's the gentleman who doesn't want me to tell the facts about Andrew M. Buckland."

"Go ahead—if you want to tell *facts!*" shouted Mr. McInnes. "Tell 'em how Andrew Buckland got your friend Magistrate Wills removed from the traffic court by showing him up as a dirty grafter."

"That's a lie!" yelled Ray, taken unawares, and went suddenly white as McInnes vaulted over the tailboard of the truck and stood confronting him.

"I told you what I'd do to a feller with a mouth like yours!" cried McInnes, and without further parley he caught and held Ray in the grip of one huge fist, while with the mate to it he dealt hammer blows upon the squirming body of the man.

Ray resisted and tried to defend himself, but his apparently stalwart form was soft, and he was like an overfed house dog in the power of a fighting terrier.

The crowd surged and murmured, but was tensely quiet for the moment, for it loved a fight. When McInnes struck his last blow, however, and dropped his man in a heap, pandemonium broke loose and the victor was hailed with deafening yells and cheers.

McInnes held up his hand, pleading to be heard, but only the men near the truck heard him explain:

"I left his handsome face alone, so's he could talk some more another night. It's his talk that will kill 'im on election day."

Then a policeman broke through the crowd and fought his way toward the cool and satisfied McInnes.

"All right, officer," said McInnes cheerily, "I'm coming. If Mayor Yates wants me to have a guard of honor, I accept with pleasure."

CHAPTER XXII.

PITCH AND TOSS.

TWO weeks before the city election the offices of the Cash-and-Carry Express Company were opened in the handsome new Forbes Building in North Square, and Andrew Buckland sat somewhat self consciously at a new mahogany desk in a plate glass inclosure, with Josephine at his elbow as his secretary.

The business had outgrown the original name, "Cash-and-Carry," but the directors of the new company voted to retain it, as the public had adopted it as a catch phrase and would be reluctant to give it up.

Two branch offices were opened for the convenience of customers in the more remote quarters of the town, and the parcel patrol now covered the city and suburbs with twenty-five motorcycles, in addition to the ten new machines especially fitted for the delivery of ready-to-serve meals from the Linden Tree Inn. Mr. Surelle had built an addition to the kitchen of the inn to accommodate the steadily increasing demand for his products, and, so uniformly had Andrew's original plans developed, a dozen local physicians got together and established a small rest room and emergency dispensary where at least one doctor was always on call, and in which strangers or tourists could obtain medical aid.

The mayoralty campaign was a source of poignant anxiety to Andrew, for he felt that he should not have allowed himself to be thrust into the unfamiliar position of a candidate, yet, standing committed, he feared that he was not responding adequately to the confidence that his backers reposed in him.

He made campaign speeches whenever his managers required him to do so, but deprecated them as the tedious talks of a man who could never hope to be a platform speaker. At most of the meetings, however, his utterances were greeted with enthusiastic applause, and his friends taxed his credulity with their assurances that his homely simplicity was the most valuable asset in their campaign.

The city was one of those old-fashioned communities peculiarly given over to one of the two old-line political parties, to the exclusion of the other one, so far as election results were concerned. Opposing factions were, therefore, merely local divisions of the old party, and for years the People's Party had enjoyed almost undisputed control of the municipal government. There were little sporadic growths of radical thinkers organized under various names, but until the City Club hurled its bombshell into the campaign, Forrest Ray had been assured of a victory without a serious contest. The old campaigners of the People's Party rallied to the battle cry and labored strenuously for their leader, but there was disaffection in some of the residential wards, and disaffection was planted in the old stand-patter wards when the candidate allowed himself to be chastised by a casual heckler in the person of McInnes, the motor car dealer.

Andrew relaxed and breathed a sigh of relief when his friends gathered about him on the evening before election, and informed him that the last speech had been made and the last round of solid shot fired into the camp of the enemy. Next day he visited the polling place dutifully, but diffidently, then hurried home with Josephine to remain in seclusion until the evening.

The City Club held open house for the receiving of the returns, and Andrew and his daughter were welcomed as the chief guests of honor, and seated just in time to listen to the report that the old Fifth Ward had polled an overwhelming vote for Buckland and the rest of the Reform ticket, with only a pathetic showing for Ray, and for Henry Buckland, the candidate for alderman.

Andrew arose, blushing like a boy, and

acknowledged the applause, but the defeat of his younger son moved him strangely, and he sat down and reflected moodily upon the incomprehensible game of life.

Presently three reports in quick succession gave as many wards to Forrest Ray and his ticket, and there were groans and some indignant hisses, but Andrew sat unmoved.

Judge Challands and his son had been touring the city, tying up the last loose ends of the campaign business, and they arrived at the City Club late. It was the first time that Josephine had met either of them face to face since she left their offices, and she was embarrassed for the moment, but the diplomatic judge engaged her instantly in a discussion of her father's campaign and saved the situation.

"We have hoped so much that we might persuade you to come back, Miss Buckland," said Edward Challands, breaking into the conversation and touching a delicate subject with a tactful absence of self consciousness; "but now it looks rather hopeless for us. Your father will be elected—we're sure of it, of course—and you will be—er—well, the first lady of the city."

At nine o'clock the members of the City Club began to show nervousness and frank anxiety. The Reform Party had carried most of the wards on the North Side, but from the tenement districts and the old strongholds of the People's Party the reports showed unexpected loyalty to political tradition. By a rough estimate the vote was tied, and the practiced prognosticators shook their heads over the few wards yet to be heard from.

Young Mr. Kendall, who had been a watcher at one of the polling places, came into the club and reported to Judge Challands that there had been disorder and confusion in the South Side wards, with clashes between the rival party officials and the watchers. Then, having discharged his duties, he gravitated toward Josephine and eagerly secured a seat near her.

"He's a fine chap—Kendall," Edward Challands said in a low voice, while Kendall was speaking to another man.

"Yes, he's very nice," Josephine responded perfunctorily. "His sister and I were great friends at college."

"Father has taken a great fancy to him," the district attorney added, "and you know I have unbounded confidence in father's judgment of human kind."

"I think Mr. Kendall is very fortunate to have a chance to study in your office," Josephine said primly; and thus the conversation went on for a time with that painful constraint which follows a break in an acquaintance that has been free and unaffected.

One of the doubtful wards was reported for Forrest Ray, but it was followed by one for Buckland which restored the tie. Two more wards went to Ray, and then a third, and at eleven o'clock a newspaper editor telephoned to the City Club and asked if Judge Challands would concede the election to Ray.

"No, I won't!" cried the judge savagely, and a storm of applause raised the spirits of the company for a moment.

Half an hour later the newspaper bulletin announced that the complete returns could not be published before morning, but that Forrest Adolphus Ray would win the election by a safe margin.

A sepulchral silence settled upon the City Club, broken only by whispered imprecations and low mutterings. Judge Challands looked at Andrew with tragic despair in his eyes, shook his head, then hurried out of the club without a word.

"It's a beastly shame!" exclaimed young Kendall.

"It's politics!" declared the district attorney gravely.

Andrew, of all the persons in the room, seemed least downhearted, and he got to his feet and spoke quietly to the company.

"My greatest regret, gentlemen," he said, "is that your hard work has gone for nothing. Some of you are experienced in politics and accustomed to shocks and disappointments; I hope the others will not give way to discouragement, but will go on fighting for a cleaner city until success comes to them.

"I have been very proud of the honor that you accorded me, but it may be that a more experienced leader could have saved

you from defeat. Next time you must choose less hastily. As for me, I admit that a defeat is not easy to accept, but I hope you will not grieve for me. I was not ambitious, and the honor came to me so unexpectedly that I have scarcely recovered from the shock. It's all over now, and I shall remember chiefly your friendship and loyal support. I have made many new friends, and I hope that I may keep them."

They applauded the speech with solemn earnestness, and Andrew was about to escort Josephine from the room, when a member of the campaign committee came in from the telephone room.

"The newspaper fellows want to know if you have sent your congratulations to Mr. Ray," he said to Andrew.

"There are times," was the unhesitating reply, "when such a courtesy could only be in bad taste. Please tell them that I have not done so, and that I do not intend to."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PENDULUM'S SWING.

THE events of the week after election unsettled the philosophic calm that Andrew had achieved, and their culmination affected him in a manner peculiarly similar to that of an anticlimax. He was resigned to defeat, but when even defeat is wrested from a man and he is left swinging in a void of doubt, his very equilibrium is threatened.

Judge Challands had dashed from the club after the receipt of the evil tidings, and charged in a fine fury upon the tightly drawn lines of the enemy. Without preliminary action he demanded that the police seize the ballot boxes and seal them, preparatory to an investigation of the election methods and a recount of the vote. The chief of police was a henchman of Mayor Yates, and he refused to act without orders from higher authority, so the judge called upon the high sheriff of the county to swear in deputies and take charge of the boxes. The sheriff was comparatively neutral and the judge bullied him into the desired action.

Then followed weary weeks of legal warfare, with the powers of the city arrayed behind Forrest Ray and his party; but Judge Challands was secure in the support of the highest authorities of the State, and his vigilance and persistence were rewarded in the end. Five weeks after the melancholy scene in the City Club, Andrew Buckland was declared mayor of the city, and four of Ray's campaign managers were under indictment for conspiracy and fraud.

In a moment Andrew became a personage. The victory lacked the dash and thrill of an original and undisputed one, but he was hailed as a rescued and vindicated hero, and ardent admirers whom he had never seen before flocked to his office with congratulations and songs of praise.

To his astonishment, Julius Medway came to his office in the Forbes Building, and when the office boy admitted him to the plate glass inclosure he shuffled across the floor and slumped into the inviting chair.

"Well, you win!" he muttered, and his voice was that of a man of advanced senility.

"Yes?" Andrew inquired, and waited.

"I have a—a problem," said Medway; "the heaviest problem of my life. We are related, Buckland; your son married my daughter. I haven't many relations, and I haven't—any friends."

"You're not well!" exclaimed the mayor-elect anxiously. "Can't I get you a glass of water? A doctor—perhaps?"

"I'm well enough," was the reply. "It's not health I'm worried about. Your honor—they'll be calling you that pretty soon—you are up. I'm down—way down. They've used me up; they can't squeeze anything more out of me; they have thrown me away. It took a good deal of courage—gall, you may call it—for me to bring myself to you. But I haven't any friends, and your son married my daughter."

"You must get a grip on yourself," Andrew said gently. "Calm down a little if you can, and tell me all about it."

"There's a lot to tell; but it might be told in a few words, at that. Ray has blown up, along with his election. Ray

and your son Henry are filing a petition in bankruptcy; there's nothing left of their grocery business but liabilities. Our company—Ray's company: the People's Service Company—is gone up the spout. They won't have anything running to-morrow, and they can't pay off their drivers."

"That's pretty bad, isn't it?" Andrew murmured gravely.

"Yes, bad! But the worst things are one's own troubles, I guess. If Ray had been elected, everything would have been different. He'd have rewarded his backers—I believe he would have rewarded 'em, because it wouldn't have cost him anything, out of his own pocket. He's generous enough when—"

"Tell me about what you call your own troubles," Andrew suggested, interrupting him.

"I took one chance too many," said Medway. "Yes, I took a hundred chances too many. I let that fellow use my money as if it was his own. I always figured I'd get it back. Why, look here! I cashed in an election bet of five hundred dollars. Men weren't betting much on you. The odds were three to one. I got five hundred dollars, but when the recount gave you the election, I'd already used the money. I owed the other man the five hundred, and I owed 'im fifteen hundred besides. See? I had to pay up, to keep the bank from hearing about it. I got the bank to put another mortgage on my house, and I paid the feller up."

"What do you want me to do for you, Julius?" Andrew asked kindly.

"I don't know," said the broken man. "Keep me out of jail, perhaps—that is, if you want to. You might hate to have your son's father-in-law in jail, I suppose. I was going to put back— You see, if the election hadn't gone wrong, I was going to put back some money—money that I borrowed, you know. The bank may know about it now; maybe there's a cop waiting for me down below."

"How much?" asked Andrew simply.

"About two thousand. Two thousand isn't so much, is it? But I can't get hold of two thousand cents. See?"

"I haven't it in ready cash," Andrew said without a breath of hesitation, "but I'll get it. I'll have it for you at two o'clock. If there's any trouble at the bank before that, send for me."

He thought that Julius swooned suddenly, and he sprang up and caught him by the shoulders as he leaned far forward in the chair; but the shoulders were shaking convulsively, and there was a sound of bitter weeping and sobbing.

"Come, come, you must brace up!" cried Andrew blithely. "You must fight the thing out, you know. You'll fix up the bank, I hope, this afternoon; and then we must find something that you can do. There may be something here in our offices."

Julius sat up and stared at Andrew from swimming eyes.

"I offered you—something that *you* could do, once," he muttered between racking sobs. "Have you—a place for a doorkeeper—here?"

"We don't use 'em," Andrew said nervously, and felt painfully embarrassed. "No, I don't know exactly what openings we shall have, but I guess we'll find some clerical work that you can do, if you want to."

Julius seemed about to speak, but he failed to do so. He stared hard at Andrew, then got up suddenly and steadied himself with a hand on the corner of the desk. He caught up his hat, fumbled with it for a moment, got it perched upon his head, and then walked unsteadily out of the room.

Andrew rang for his office boy.

"Put on your cap, Tommy," he said, "and run along after Mr. Medway. He's sick, and I wish you'd follow him and see that he gets back to his office all right."

At five o'clock in the afternoon a somewhat stronger and more controlled Julius Medway went home and entered the spacious library upon two white faced women and a scared young man who held a cigarette between twitching fingers.

"Well, you left us in suspense for only eight hours!" exclaimed Mrs. Medway, rendering unconsciously an impersonation of Lady Macbeth. "I sent for the newspapers, but I couldn't find that you had been arrested."

"Don't, mother!" implored Faith, who had wept much. "And, father, please don't stand there and look like that! If you have anything to tell, tell it!"

"I was not arrested," said Julius; "I got the money."

Faith uttered a shrill scream—a peculiar expression of unexpected relief after hours of agony and hysteria.

Mrs. Medway controlled herself and stared at her husband.

"I hope you are telling us the truth," she said awfully. "If I am incredulous it's because I didn't believe there was a human being on earth who would help you. You'd better tell us how—where you got the money, if you can!"

"I got it," began Julius a little defiantly, and then caught at a chair for support and began to cry like a child. "I got it—from Andrew Buckland. From the Hon. Andrew M. Buckland—mayor of the city. I went and told him—told him all about everything—and he helped me out."

Mrs. Medway sat down heavily and her hands clasped and unclasped so convulsively that the joints cracked.

"If an alienist should say that your mind is gone, I might understand—I might forgive you," she said, "but if you are sane, you are lower than—than the worms! And it seems that you respect yourself no more than I respect you."

"Be still, woman!" Julius suddenly cried, turning on her in such a fury that she shuddered and shrank from him for the first time in her life.

"I'm still alive and still sane," he announced harshly. "I may get a new start—through Andrew Buckland—and now I want some rest and peace. Hereafter, you keep a civil tongue in your head."

"You must understand, father," said Faith almost timidly, "that we're fairly beside ourselves. Nothing but worry and fear and horrors for days and days. And it seems that there's no humiliation too terrible for us. Think of it—Andrew Buckland helping *you*. And you went to him and asked him for help."

Henry Buckland's face got back some of its natural color, and he sat down in a comfortable chair and lighted a cigarette.

"Take it all for all," he said, "the old man was always pretty white, if you knew how to understand 'im."

"Damn your insolence, you whelp!" shouted Julius Medway, so violently that they all started back in alarm. "You'll speak of your father with respect while you're in my house, or you'll get out!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WORD.

JUDGE CHALLANDS gave a reception for the mayor-elect at his home, and so genial and so gracious was his mood, in the flush of victory, that he caused the Medways, the Henry Bucklands, and the James Bucklands, to be invited. He had conferred with Andrew on the matter, and the latter said that if enmity and spite were to continue in the family, it must not be because he had not offered the hand of fellowship.

"That's splendid!" exclaimed the judge, delighted. "Forgive and forget! That's the spirit!"

"I don't know about that, exactly," Andrew said lightly. "Forgiving, it seems to me, is done by egoists; you've got to be a pretty superior person to have the authority to forgive. And forgetting—that's well nigh impossible for a normal mind, isn't it? The unpleasant things stick in the mind so long! I'm inclined to think that the best thing to do is to keep on being decent, in spite of memory or injured pride."

So the invitations were sent to some persons who least expected to receive them, and the emotions they aroused were varied in kind and in degree.

Viola Buckland was flustered, and she and her husband together were suspicious of condescension.

"It didn't cost them much to send us that card," Viola said, "and I suppose they think they've done a good deed; but wouldn't they be taken 'back some if we should accept?"

They discussed it exhaustively, but it was Viola who settled the question at last.

"I wouldn't go into that house," she de-

clared, "unless I was dressed as well as any woman there, so that means we don't go. I wouldn't buy an expensive dress for the sake of going to dine with the Queen of England."

In the Medway family the sensation was more profound.

"This is to do honor to Andrew Buckland," said Julius, "and I should be an ingrate if I refused to go. I shall go if I live."

"I shall not go," his wife announced.

"Suit yourself!" returned Julius; "it's nothing to me what you do."

"But what a position to put us in at this time!" protested Faith, who had come over with Henry for the conference. "Socially it means little to me, one way or the other; we're ruined financially, and there's no more social life for us anyway."

"That's your estimate of society!" said her father severely: "money, and clothes, and motor cars!"

"They're all gone, so you needn't worry about that," she replied. "But I'm sure I don't know what to do. I'm ground down into the dust and my nerves are all shattered, don't you understand?"

"You still have one or two gowns?" queried Julius.

"One or two—yes; hardly more than that."

"Then you'll go, all right," he said, "so what's the use of arguing all around the matter when you've had it settled in your mind from the start?"

"It's very strange!" remarked Mrs. Medway, returning to the discussion. "We have lived here all our lives, we have occupied a prominent social position for years, yet this is the first time that Mrs. Challands ever allowed us to set foot on the royal carpet. We're ruined and disgraced now, and she invites us to a house to which a thousand people in this town would give their eyes to go."

"Oh! so you've decided to go, too!" her husband exclaimed unkindly. "How about you, Henry? Have you got any doubts and fears to argue off your mind?"

"Why, I've never been actually *out* with father," the young man explained virtuously.

"Thanks to your father," snapped Julius. "Don't try to put any holier-than-thou stuff over on me, young man; I'm too familiar with the facts."

So they all went—all of the Medway clan; and even Viola made a concession to the grandeur of the Challands family, for she purchased some imported French note paper upon which to write her regrets.

Andrew Buckland was a plain man, but he was not one to flaunt his native plainness from high places in the populai political manner. The city—or at least its sharpest eyes—saw him alight from his own new motor car at the Challands house, and saw him for the first time arrayed in formal evening clothes, and it marveled greatly.

Josephine, too—the former stenographer, and latterly a young woman out of a job—was dressed as befitted the "first lady of the city," and looked for all the world like the court beauties who appear in rotogravure Sunday supplements.

It was not a very formal function, but Judge Challands had distinguished friends at his beck and call, and the gaping city got another thrill when the Governor of the State dropped in without fuss or feathers, and was followed by a jolly looking United States Senator whose face had been made familiar to the populace by cartoons and snapshots.

It was Josephine's first visit to the mansion, and she admired the old-fashioned elegance and luxury of the historic home as frankly as a young girl should. So the district attorney himself took her out to see the inner court, built like the patio of a Spanish house, with all its blooming flowers and exotic palms.

"And while we're away from the world and his wife, Miss Jo," he said facetiously, "I've a little problem for you to clear up for me. I don't want to be impertinent and rude, but—well, what have you done to poor Winthrop Kendall?"

She covered her quick confusion with a laugh, but her blushes could not be covered.

"Well, now, I'd say that any other man *was* impertinent," she answered, "but it's natural for lawyers to ask leading questions, I suppose.

"Really," she went on, having recovered some of her poise, "I'm surprised to hear that I'm suspected of doing anything to Mr. Kendall."

"I see that I shall have to proceed at once to cross-examination," he laughed. "Seriously, you must forgive me, for I'm going to be terribly frank. Father and I took young Winthrop Kendall under our wings, as it were, and we're fond of him. He was determined to make this city his home, after he had been here a week, and we couldn't let him drift about aimlessly, without doing anything for his professional future. We've been father and uncle to him for the last few months, and he has become one of the family.

"But now," he said more gravely, "he threatens to leave us and cast himself into unknown seas again. He was determined to live in this city, as I said, and for a very particular reason. Poor chap, that particular reason has gone wrong, somehow, and he's suddenly determined *not* to live in this city."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Josephine, "when his association with your firm might mean so much to his career."

"Isn't it too bad?" he said, looking at her intently.

"But can't you do anything, Mr. Challands. I'm sure he'd listen to your advice, and he worships your father."

"I've tried to do something, but he tells me himself that it's too late now. It's all that 'particular reason' that's making all the trouble."

"How extraordinary!"

"I'm afraid you'd make a difficult witness, Miss Buckland."

"Oh, but I'm listening to everything you say, Mr. Challands, and I'm awfully sorry about it all."

"If you force me to third degree tactics, I may be insufferably rude," he warned her. "I'm intent, you see, on finding out all I can about that 'particular reason.'

"But how can I help you?"

"You ought to be able to; you are the particular reason yourself, you see."

She lowered her head and appeared a little angry for a moment.

"Let's be thoroughly serious," he suggested earnestly. "Kendall thinks you have as good as sent him away, and he's a melancholy chap. We've been presumptuous enough—father and I—to talk about Kendall's affairs rather intimately with him. We thought that you liked him, and we knew for a certainty that he—that he 'was determined to live in this city for a very particular reason'."

"I'll be honest, Mr. Challands," she said impulsively. "I didn't send Mr. Kendall away, but I warned him in the kindest possible way that I simply could not be that particular reason. We've had lots of fun together, going about, and he's just as good company as his sister was when we were in college together. I suppose I was terribly wrong in thinking that we could go on having good times like that. He got too serious, and too unhappy, all at once, and —surely I had to tell him the truth, didn't I?"

"And that's the truth that cuts the deepest!" he exclaimed. "I suppose, then, that that's all there is to it, as far as you are concerned. I think if I were an older man —father ought really to have done this, you know—I think I would ask you if you were quite sure that you knew your own mind. Kendall is an unusual chap, believe me! What if you were to know him longer, and see him as we have seen him in our friendship. You see, I'm trying to ask you, Miss Jo, if there isn't a possible chance for the lad?"

"He asked me that, if you must know," she replied rather coldly. "It's one of my peculiarities, Mr. Challands, that I rarely change my mind, once it's made up. I'm impressionable and impulsive, but when I have formed a definite conviction it seems to stay with me."

She had dropped down upon one of the garden seats, and he walked slowly back and forth in front of her.

"You don't mind if I smoke, do you?" he inquired, and lighted a cigarette when she gave permission.

"I'm sorry I couldn't help you about Mr. Kendall," she said presently. "Don't you think we should be going back now?"

"If you want to," he agreed. "I'm sorry, too; and I hope you'll forgive me for mak-

ing you all this trouble. It was inexcusable impudence, I know. And it's the last time I'll ever play John Alden for any young Miles Standish."

She looked at him with a quick lifting of the head and challenged him.

"I think perhaps I have a right to know," she said spiritedly, "if Mr. Kendall is so—so—well, if Mr. Kendall would go so far as to get another man to intercede for him. I don't think I should like that."

"You misjudge him," he declared. "No. I assure you that he didn't dream that I would intercede for him. I did it on my own responsibility, and I felt that I had to do it. He told me certain things that—I wonder if I ought to tell you what he *did* tell me?"

He dropped his cigarette and stood before her in something of an attitude of humble supplication.

"I—I'm sure I don't know whether you ought to or not," she said nervously, and seemed ready to fly from the garden.

"It'll be the last straw," he said, "but I'm going to do it. Kendall told me, Miss Jo, that if I had the wit of a mouse, and eyes to see, I should know that my own case was not as hopeless as his."

She did start to flee, but she paused on the other side of the garden seat.

"Your own case!" she whispered.

"I've been a John Alden all along," he confessed humbly. "I'm not a demonstrative man. We are rather a repressed family naturally. But I could hardly know you, and see you in the office every day, without dreaming dreams and making wishes. I asked myself repeatedly if I were not too old for such fancies, and I assured myself repeatedly that I would yet put the question to the test.

"Then you left us, you know, and with that outrageous trial scene torturing my mind every day, I lost hope. Kendall came to town, and we all heard—we were all sure that you liked him."

"It was self defense!" she exclaimed impulsively. "I suppose it was contemptible in me, but—don't you see?—I had been accused, as it were, of setting my cap for the Challands family. I seized upon poor Mr. Kendall as sort of an alibi. I did like him, and at first I was so troubled that I wondered if I might not be able to like him very much and—"

"And what?"

"And forget everything else!" she said with an air of recklessness.

"Tell me," he said abruptly, "is it possible that I had the honor of being the 'everything else'?"

She walked around the seat again, and suddenly she sat down and began to cry softly.

"My dear!" he cried, but stood staring at her rather foolishly.

"Priscilla was no bolder than I am, it seems," she said faintly, without raising her head. "But why—Oh! Oh! why do people have to be so utterly miserable, when a word might set everything right? I was happy when I was working in your office, but after I left, and after I heard all that had been said, I thought I almost hated the whole Challands family."

"I say, let's straighten the whole muddle out now," he proposed boyishly. "You have suggested the remedy: 'One word might set everything right,' you said. Will you say the one word?"

"I might," she answered, "on cross-examination."

CHAPTER XXV.

A HOUSE IN ORDER.

MRS. MEDWAY, who found it difficult to be as gracious in her review of the reception as she really would have liked to be, said next day that Andrew Buckland took to society like a very sleek old drake taking to water.

"I'm not suggesting that his manners and deportment might have been improved upon," she told Faith and Henry and Julius, "for he really carried off the affair quite creditably. I'm only hoping that these things won't go to his head. Some of the out-of-town guests spoke to me charmingly of his sprightliness and his naïve simplicity. Now if he were to become conceited, it would be a great pity."

"You're one of his safeguards!" exclaimed her husband. "So long as he's

willing to remain on friendly terms with you, Susan, he'll have a restraining influence. No one ever got conceited through your kindly attentions."

Mrs. Medway's fears were not allayed, however, by subsequent events. She felt that Andrew, as the practical head of a rather important corporation, and as the mayor of the city, should not forget that he was not so long before a comparatively humble person, and she regarded it as disquieting evidence of his growing sophistication and worldliness that he presently purchased a new house of some elegance in the select suburb near the Country Club.

She feared that a liveried chauffeur and an English butler might follow, but Andrew and his daughter were satisfied with two maid servants, and their motor car was piloted by the unpretentious man who had driven Andrew's first delivery truck.

Faith was not happy in these days, but she was cowed and rather silent. At times the world was still too much with her, and she gave way to her feelings with the expressive scorn of her earlier manner.

"I wonder," she said, "if these society monkeys will dance after Josephine as much when her father loses his head over political ambition and then loses his money."

"Not all heads are as easily lost as those of the Medway family," Julius informed her tartly.

"You know," Faith went on persistently, "that a man at the Challands reception predicted that Andrew would not stop with the government of a city. I watched Andrew, and he drank it in like *Macbeth* when he was listening to the witches."

A little later Andrew gave a dinner party in his new house, and it was in certain ways a decidedly old-fashioned affair. Faith was struck instantly with the incongruity of the mixture of guests, for Mr. McInnes and Mr. and Mrs. James Buckland sat down at table with the whole Challands family, and it was quite enough, she thought, that Mrs. Challands should consent to meet even the Medways, since they lost everything but the honor that Andrew had saved for them.

It was, the host informed his guests, a simple family dinner party, and he counted himself fortunate in being able to get the whole family together.

Judge Challands smiled approvingly, and recalled Andrew's words: "I'm inclined to think that the best thing to do is to keep on being decent, in spite of memory or injured pride." Andrew was busily engaged in being decent, though there were persons at the board who must stir memory to its darkest depths, and who had left scars on his heart that could hardly be healed.

"It's the first party in the house, you know," Andrew went on, "and I'm sure it will be a memorable one. You'll come here, again and again—all of you—and when the new house is an old one, and some of us are not coming around any more, I hope the others will remember that we had a good time this day.

"I'm having a thoroughly good time," he assured them blithely, "for I'm getting my house in order for the first time in my life. The business seems to be established, and we are all able to enjoy some benefits from it. Our friend Julius has just consented to act as the manager of our supply and purchasing department, and Henry will be his associate and assistant."

"I told Andrew," said Julius somewhat hoarsely, "that it would be an honor for me to sweep out his office, but he's made me a manager."

Mrs. Medway compressed her lips and reflected that Julius always made himself ridiculous in public.

"Jimmie-boy," continued Andrew, smiling at his elder son, who tried manfully to manage a responsive grin, "is going to help us in the treasurer's office, and he will learn good conservative banking methods there."

Viola felt that her cue had sounded, and she leaned forward and said to her father-in-law and host:

"You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from my father. He has some sort of a position in a hotel at Atlantic City, but he said that the work was not exactly congenial. He sent you his kind regards."

"Please remember me to him when you write," said Andrew, and Viola knew that

Stephen Preece's last opportunity had passed.

"I really ought to stand up and make a speech, I suppose," Andrew began, with some embarrassment, "for I'm coming now to a mighty important piece of news, but I insist that this is first and last a family party, and I can't be formal. Our distinguished district attorney here looks innocent and harmless enough, but some of my political friends tell me that he's going to desert us pretty soon, to go down to Washington and represent his district in Congress."

"Hear! hear!" cried Julius Medway, who was feeling blissfully at home under the genial influence of his host.

"But that isn't the worst of it!" exclaimed Andrew, affecting a pained expression. "He's not only going to leave us, but he's going to take my housekeeper away from me; and as though her name wasn't good enough for anybody, he's going to change it to Josephine Challands."

The announcement brought the guests to their feet, and Faith hastened, in spite of the joyous hubbub, to assure Josephine across the table that nothing within memory had made her so inexpressibly happy.

"I wish," chuckled Mr. McInnes, who felt a little self-conscious in such select company, "that Mr. Forrest Ray might just happen to peek in the window about now."

"Wish something better than that for us!" laughed the host. "I never knew distance to lend so much enchantment to anything as it has to that fellow. The last report had him somewhere in the oil country in Oklahoma, and there's something sort of appropriate about oil for Forrest Ray."

Presently the company left the table and Andrew conducted them on a tour of the new house.

"Do you know," Faith whispered in her mother's ear at the first opportunity, "that Josephine will be the acknowledged society leader of this city for the rest of her life?"

"I know it very well," was the whispered response, "but I see very little to regret about it. There will be advantages in being related by marriage to Mrs. Edward Challands."

"Who said anything about regretting it?" Faith demanded crossly. "No one is more enchanted than I am over the good fortune that has come to the dear, sweet child."

At midnight the new house was silent, and the rooms were deserted, but Andrew, in dressing gown and slippers, stole softly down to the library, where a log fire glowed cheerily in the grate. It was his log fire, his library, his house, and he could hardly think of going to bed to close his eyes against so much comfort and cheer.

He took up a magazine from the table and drew a chair close to the fire, and when he idly turned the pages of pictures and print he caught sight of his own likeness and recognized a snapshot that some of the newspaper fellows had made on the day of his taking the oath of office.

He grinned sheepishly, all by himself, for it was new business for him to be a mayor, and new business for people to want his picture in magazines and papers. He was a little embarrassed, in fact, when he yielded to the temptation to read the article that accompanied the picture.

It was a story of his rise from an almost overwhelming business failure to the picturesque success that made him the presiding genius over a great and growing corporation. It told of his struggles and battles, and made a telling climax of the sensational election that made him the leader of the reform movement and the chief executive of his city. The final paragraph read:

> Andrew M. Buckland is still a young man, scarcely turned fifty, and in the years of activity that lie before him who knows what he may not do to benefit his fellow men and fix his name indelibly upon the roll of the immortals?

There were tears of emotion in Andrew's eyes, but he was glad that no one had seen him reading the article.

"'Still a young man'!" he murmured softly to the fire, "and a few months ago I was too old to get a job in a grocery store."

THE END

Bay East Bay West

By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

IN the single room of his split-log trapping shack "Etawney" Severn lay on the bunk rapped in two great Hudson's Bay blankets and gazing with dulled eyes at the bear-intestine window. Ceiling and walls were coated thick with hoar frost. To prevent this from falling and to seal up the cabin against the seventy below blizzard, the rime had been wetted and frozen into a glaze of ice, which the bright-red sheet-iron "jerry" did not even threaten to melt.

Etawney was not worried about his badly nipped lungs. He felt sure that, with absolute rest and long sleep, his tough body would shake off the sickness in a few weeks and his lungs would become as leathery as ever. But the pain had drawn deep lines across his unshaven face and contorted his twitching features. His temples were near to bursting; and his eyes ached with even the half-light that filtered down through the great drift banked over the tiny window. His chest was on fire; and when the spells of near-suffocation seized him and he had to breathe deeper, he gripped the bunk in an uncontrollable spasm of anguish.

The blizzard howling down from Baffin ice-barrens struck the half-buried cabin with cudgel strokes and rattled the roof-timbers. Its sharp, staccato blasts hammered unceasingly, benumbingly, at his brain. For a week now the cold fury had smitten Labrador, and streamed its snow banners high over the savage *haut-d'en pais* wilderness. The spirit thermometer, day after day, had dropped, sixty, sixty-five, seventy below, where the graduation stopped, and lower still. But in spite of its warning, Etawney had gone out to run his fur-path. And frozen lungs were the penalty for trying to lean against a sixty-mile gale at seventy-odd below zero.

With an effort he reached down beside the bunk for a drink of water. The cold draft eased the pain and he dropped into semi-consciousness, a coma of pain and weariness.

After an hour, the red faded slowly from the unfed "jerry"; the temperature inside the cabin plummeted; and ice formed over

the bucket beneath the bunk. Etawney stirred from cold; awakened. Slowly, resting at each stage and step, he rose, crossed the room and filled the stove. When its top glowed again, he set on it a pan of bruise and 'lassy seal-bun to heat. He ate listlessly, like one who forces himself to eat in order to retain strength.

He was back in his bunk, fighting a breathing spasm brought on by his exertion, when the door opened, slammed quickly shut again, and a fur-swathed figure bent to unbuckle his rackets.

For several moments neither spoke. Etawney lay quiet, his head thrown back, his arms bent under the bunk edges to assist his hoarse breathing. The newcomer, a medium-tall, wiry, young sparkle-eyed Indian, unmistakably a Montagnais, took off his white fox capote and outer jacket of autumn-tanned caribou. Then he went to the bunk and looked down.

Etawney, breathing easier, rose upon his elbow.

"Well, Klatawa?" he asked, sibilantly.

"I come see how you get 'long."

"Pretty good. Not hurt so much now. Getting better, Klatawa."

The Indian nodded. "Good."

"What made you come through this blizzard? I've got grub and wood yet from your last time here."

"Thought maybe you like this," said Klatawa. He produced mysteriously from somewhere on his person a brace of fresh snow ptarmigan. "Broth fine. You eat this, then you wrestle a water-bear to-morrow."

Severn grinned at Klatawa's attempt at a cheering jest. The Indian went outside and carried in enough wood to last the night. Then, squatting near the stove, he plucked at the ptarmigan. Severn watched him in silence till the half-light began to fall.

"Better stop that and start home quick, Klatawa," he urged. "It's a long way, two hours swift stepping, back to your fur-path."

"No furs running," Klatawa replied tersely. "Stay with you till blizzard stops."

Etawney, surprised yet infinitely relieved, said nothing until the Indian had made the broth and brought it to the bunk.

"You're a good sport, Klatawa," he remarked, sipping it. "I'm glad I half-killed that Brûlé, who was jumping up and down on your face at Great Whale River Fort last fall."

Klatawa's copper visage darkened at the recollection.

"Tell you this, Klatawa," Severn went on, feeling better from the broth, but a little queer from the ledum herbs with which the Indian had spiced it, "this Labrador side of Hudson's Bay is the devil's own country. Men say the Keechee Manitou made all the world in six days and spent the seventh throwing stones at Labrador. About so, Klatawa. This Bay East country is nothing but rocks. Trees wind-twisted and man-high. Nothing to stop blizzards except these granite swells. Summers just two months of icy rain. Ground covered with big gray mice, and air full of mosquitoes and bulldogs. Winters so cold they freeze a man's lungs inside him. Indians no good; nobody but spider-legged Micks. Takes a year to get to the outside. A man lives on a raw edge here. The devil's own hauling grounds, this is, Klatawa.

"Take the Bay West. You know Fort Churchill? Good. Go back one hundred and fifty, two hundred miles, to the Muskrat Country. Keechee Manitou's land, that is, Klatawa. Wonderful deep woods. Lake with lots of white fish and sturgeon. Muskrats and beaver tear down the creek banks. In April and October, it takes the caribou *foule* three whole days to pass your cabin. Nice, still cold in winter. Won't freeze your lungs. Sunshine and poppy flowers everywhere for five months in summer. Two weeks, three weeks, to the outside, in a birch-rind. It's a rich land, Klatawa; the place for a man to live.

"I'm going back there. Going to get married and put up a post on a portage lake I've had an eye on. Lots of strong-wood Crees pass Etawney Lake. Good trappers, good traders. I've got the furs to sell an' stock up a post. That's why I came over here this winter—to get 'em. Furs here are dark and high-priced. Lots of patches and silvers. Only good thing about this

Bay East. You've seen my batch. That bundle of marten is worth just exactly its weight in gold. And that blackie—no place but the Labrador is cold enough to grow a blackie like that. D'you ever see a pair of silvers match like those two of mine? Took 'em in the same fox-bed, straight nights.

"You're going back with me, Klatawa. You're Montagnais; you don't belong here with these Micks. You can't trap. You and these Micks don't know how, or this fur wouldn't be so thick. You'd like to lope the bush. I'll send you out *en dourine* from my post to give debt to the Indians and bring in their furs. Give you all your supplies and a salary. You can get a Yellow-Knife girl, Klatawa, for your squaw-siche. Will you go along?"

Klatawa shook his head. "Bay East my country. Born here, stay here. But better not talk too much," he warned.

Severn's speech was ever so slightly tinged with delirium; and his hoarse voice rattled and broke repeatedly as he talked. The Indian's warning came too late. A breathing spasm seized the white man and for several minutes he fought desperately for breath.

"You quit talk now," Klatawa ordered. "Let me talk. Got something 'portant to say. You listen close.

"Been too much talk 'bout furs you take. Ever-body know you have black and silvers. Nastapoka River Micmacs know. I got long ears. I hear talk among Micmacs. They know you sick. Better watch. Better be ready. Better let me take furs in to post. Micmacs come some night on cat feet and take ever'thing while you sleep."

"Huh!" Etawney interrupted. "The Micks are afraid to try that with me. Besides, they couldn't sell the furs without getting caught."

"You lay on your back here for a half moon yet," Klatawa argued. "They take furs mebbe to Fort Chimo 'fore you able to follow. They hide in Death River water-head. They band of dozen bucks. Got belt guns and rifles. They not 'fraid of you; not 'fraid of both us. Huh! I know. Blizzard bineby stop, they come quick, come sure."

"Then, that's why you came to stay with me?" queried Etawney.

"Stay just till blizzard stop," Klatawa corrected.

"Then I better take furs into post. Micmacs won't hurt you. 'Fraid to kill white man, but not 'fraid to steal furs from sick man."

"I'll think about it," Severn said cautiously.

Klatawa grunted and wrapped himself for the night in a wolf-skin rug on the floor.

II.

SEVERN stayed awake, thinking. His head was clear and he could reason straight. Despite his friendship with Klatawa, some impulse, born perhaps of his mistrust of all Indians, made him suspicious of the Montagnais's advice. He did not altogether believe the talk about the Nastapoka River Micks. It sounded a bit exaggerated. Especially since the idea of danger from the spindly *haut-d'en pais* Micks, so different from the manly Athabascan Crees, had never entered his mind. Even if they did gang to come after his furs, he could stand them off, he and Klatawa.

He didn't like the thought of trusting his precious furs to an Indian, even to Klatawa, who seemed to be a good sort. Those hard-won pelts represented a solid year of scouting up the Labrador coast rivers for good grounds, and then nine months of battling against blizzards, carcajous, and dangerous barren-ground wolves; of tailing out long, moiling trap-lines and running them through still cold and bitter storm; and of bare existence in a high country that was so lonely that a single winter of it had the usual trapper "shaking hands with the willows."

The furs represented not only the work and the long white months of loneliness and self-denial; but a snug post on Etawney Lake; a home, and settled comfort, which Severn, rounding thirty-five and his wanderlust lulled, was beginning to feel the call and tug of. Luck had been with him in getting that phenomenal catch; luck aided by his unflagging toil and his Bay West skill with scented trap and baited

deadfall. Hence, with his post already built—in his mind—and everything installed down to and including the wife, Severn was set against letting the furs out of his sight.

The more he turned the situation over in his brain, the clearer he saw that something was behind Klatawa's advice. What impelled the Indian to this sudden generosity and friendliness? Hardly his short-lived gratitude for that rescue at the post. Etawney could not guess the Indian's motives. But the native had some cunning scheme. Helpless, at Klatawa's mercy, Etawney swore caution to himself.

The next morning Klatawa again suggested that he should take the furs and start for the post.

"No," Severn parried, watching the Indian closely. "S'pose one dozen, two dozen, or three dozen Micks *do* come to steal the furs. You and me, we'd shoot the idea clean out of 'em. We could hold this cabin against a hundred."

"Till grub and wood all gone," Klatawa commented tersely. "Or till they pile deer bush against cabin and start little fire."

"We'll wait for 'em to try that. If you don't want to get in a fight, you clear out before the blizzard stops."

Klatawa sulked all the morning, answering Etawney's questions with angry grunts or solid silence. That afternoon, when he left the cabin for an hour to hunt ptarmigan in the river spruce drogue, Etawney hid a loaded belt gun under his blanket and hung the rifle near his bunk. Upon the Indian's return, he made out to be a good deal sicker than he really was.

Toward evening the blizzard showed signs of breaking. And Klatawa, to Severn's quick eyes, betrayed signs of uneasiness. Whatever he was up to, he would attempt that night. As he prepared the ptarmigan, he eyed the rifle beside the bunk, suspecting its purpose there. Severn drank the broth, resolving not to bat an eye until morning.

But, a few minutes later, something heavy and hot began to press down upon him. He felt as if he were swaying in the top of a high tree. Sleep, irresistible, began to blank his mind; he was unable to move, to raise a hand toward his rifle. His last clear thought was the realization that Klatawa, watching from behind the stove, had drugged the broth.

When he awoke, after hours of heavy slumbering, he felt no ill effects from the decoction. The memory of how he had gone to sleep, of his suspicions, and of the Indian watching him, flooded back like a sudden slap of water. He knew, without looking up at the fur loft, that his precious pelts were gone. Klatawa, with rackets, coat and rifle, had vanished.

He got up, filled the stove, and pulled himself up the notched-pole ladder to the boarded corner where his furs had been. Of the whole valuable peltry, only a couple carcajous, the wolf skins, a fisher or two, and the cheap white foxes had been left behind. Better than twenty-three hundred dollars in furs gone at one sweep! Gone irrecoverably, too, for before he would be able to stir out, Klatawa would have sold the fur and crossed the Koksoak height-of-land to safe hiding among the thousands of lakes south of the Ungava.

Klatawa's scheme was plain enough now. He had first talked about the Micks in order to make it appear that they would come some night and take the furs. Severn saw farther still into the scheme. Klatawa must have known that the Micks *were* coming.

He reasoned that the white man would not be able to climb to the loft. If the theft was not discovered until after the Micks had come and gone, his own guilt would be hidden. It could not be proved who took the furs.

So sure of this was Etawney that he waited momentarily for the gang all that day. Nor was he disappointed. In the purple twilight of early afternoon, they came. A smoked face peered through the door and stared at him. Behind the face was a dark patch of men and small dogs. With no reason now for fighting, Severn made no effort to keep them out; though his hands itched to grab his rifle and perforate half a dozen of them before they could get him. But with three of them watching with guns at ready, it would be suicide, sure and swift.

Several of them scurried up the ladder. At their grunts of chagrin and anger, Severn smiled sardonically. They piled out of the loft, gesticulating, with hoarse cries; and demanded to know where he had put the other pelts, the precious ones.

"Klatawa, the Montagnais, was here before you," he said in the dialect. "He told me you were coming to steal my furs. As payment for his words, he took the furs himself."

It was some slight satisfaction to Etawney to know, from the Micks' howls of anger, that Klatawa's lease on life would terminate very suddenly if they could track him.

He managed to get up and slam the open door. The cold air, the exertion, and excitement made him worse. He felt like giving up. The post and all that went with it were gone. There wasn't much to keep breathing for, especially since with every breath a pain seared his chest. When relief from the prolonged spasm finally came, he turned wearily toward the wall and fell asleep.

III.

It was a month before Severn felt strong enough for the trip to the Bay and down to the post. The last savage March blizzard had kicked over; the first Chinook had blown across the great bay from the beloved Athabascan strong woods and melted the snow off the pink granite swells. High V's of pin-tails, blue-winged teal, and gray geese honked and clackered north to their Straits' rookeries. Bands of caribou passed northeast *en traverse*. The deer bush began to show out of the ten-foot drifts. Furs were common now, and faded from spring sun.

Etawney was a week traveling down the river to the coast, where he turned south toward the post. The rocky landwash teemed with plover, with cormorants, with clouds of tern and shrill-winged guillemots. The sea-ice had broken up. Seals sported in the shoals of capulin; water bears riding the new blue bergs, stalked the seals; and foxes hung about the bellycarder rookeries for an unprotected white-coat.

To all of which Etawney had deaf ears and eyes. He wanted nothing but to get out of the country; to get back to the Bay West, where several years of hard work might enable him to dream again of having the post.

"Hullo, Etawney," greeted McAlmers, the temporary factor at Great Whale River factory. "Been expecting you."

"When's that boat coming by and crossing to Fort Churchill?" Severn demanded sharply.

"Well, any day now. But what's the hurry?"

"I want to get out of this damned country."

McAlmers smiled. He had heard Severn's diatribes against the Labrador region before.

"Smoke of smokes, didn't you catch more this winter than you could catch over there in five?"

"Me? Caught a pair of frozen lungs. See any furs in my pack, do you?"

"No, but that blackie and them two matched silvers, not to mention one hundred and eighty marten listed to your credit, are a pretty tidy haul."

Severn dropped his tump pack, and went pale.

"How? What?" he stammered. "How do you know I caught 'em? What are you splitting your face about?"

McAlmers chuckled. "Klatawa told me all about it. Told me he heard what the Micks were plotting, and tried to warn you. But you got suspicious and wanted to shoot him, and he had to put you to sleep, steal your furs, and bring them in to keep the Micks from getting them."

Etawney sat down suddenly on an overturned canoe.

"Where's Klatawa?" he blurted, when he could talk. "I want to see him *personally*."

"Down the coast swatching white-coats. He said something about going back to the Muskrat Country with you. Said something about it being the Keechee Manitou's hang-out. Nice, still cold. Sunshine and poppy flowers everywhere. No thieving Micks to gang like wolves and steal from a sick man, or hang on to a fellow's trail for two hundred miles, shooting him at

every jump." McAlmers was grinning hugely.

"Meaning what, by them last words?" Etawney demanded, paling under his bronze.

"What? Why, somehow or other they tracked him. He outran 'em and outshoot 'em for the last hundred miles into the post. If he goes back into the bush, they'll sure get him. So he's going across with you to live among the sunshine and poppy flowers in the Keechee Manitou land, the land of real men, where the beaver and muskrat tear—"

"Huh, I dono," Etawney demurred. "A place that can grow furs like I took and Indians like Klatawa, isn't so bad, I guess, I guess. And—" he added—"the durndest, biggest fool I know was borned across this bay."

THE END

THE FAMILY COMES TO CHRISTMAS DINNER

I WONDER do your kin-folks come
To Christmas dinner, every year?
Ours do—and don't I hate it though?
But mother always asks 'em here!

I never see 'em other times,
At least not all together, so,
But Christmas brings 'em every one—
From gran'ma down to Baby Joe.

I have to leave my toys an' things,
An' 'cause o' comp'ny, chain the pup,
An' mother says, "Now, Sam, be nice—
Go change your suit an' get washed up!"

I shake hands with 'em when they come
An' kiss my gran'ma and the aunts,
An' they all say, "*My*, but he's tall!
Soon he'll be puttin' on long pants!"

An' then they ask how ol' I am,
An' tell me that I grow *so* fast—
I wasn't but so high, they say,
Last Christmas when they saw me last.

Who do I look like they ask next
An' turn me roun' an' stare at me,
An' talk about me—'fore my face—
But somehow, none of 'em agree!

They talk about that awful long,
An' then they speak about my school—
An' they ask mother am I smart—
She says "My Sammy is no fool!"

"He got the speakin' prize last month,"
She tells all of 'em—right out loud!
It makes me feel a fool, all right,
But mother—she acts awful proud!

"He gets his brains from our side,"
Says dad—but mother asks him why
He should say that, when they all know
How smart was her great-uncle Si.

An' that starts somethin', sure enough,
An' they all argue, every one,
Till "Dinner's ready" calls our girl,
An' then—well, then begins *my* fun!

Glen Allen.

Out of the Dope Book

By HUGH FULLERTON

WEIGHT, age, condition, jockey, distance, class, breeding and a dry, heavy, or sloppy track we can figure. Any fellow who has followed the horses, armed with a record of their past performance, a lead pencil, patience and some knowledge of arithmetic can calculate with a fair degree of certainty what horses ought to be in the money, even if racing luck prevents them from being there. But there are things connected with horse racing that no man can figure. The accident insurance statisticians speak of it as the human equation—and if you can figure the human equation and the horse equation you have a chance.

There was Uncle Dan Turness, and Davey Layton and Skilligalee and the Hammonton stakes, for instance. If you will look back through the old form sheets and trace the dope on Skilligalee through his five-year-old racing form you will find that he won the Hammonton that year at odds of 60 to 100, although the bookmakers —there were bookmakers in those days— would have handed you a ticket and crayon and let you write it yourself if you suggested betting on Skilligalee. The form sheet shows that he won, beating Robin Adair, Copper Heels, Half a Twin, and nine others of the pick of all ages racing in America that year.

You'll find all the callous facts and figures, but you never will find the story of that race unless you go up to a farm in the Ohio hills and get old Uncle Dan to tell it to you. And, in spite of the fact that he had a ten-dollar bet straight and got a hundred to one for it from a friendly bookmaker who advised him to keep his money to buy supper, Uncle Dan says it came straight from the Old Dope Book.

Queer fellow, Uncle Dan was—and still is. As gentle, kindly and lovable an old fellow as ever loved a horse or a dog. He had little education, although he could read and write. He came from somewhere down in the hill section of Ohio, from a farm. Starting with the trotting horses around the fairs, he drifted to the runners, and in time accumulated a stable of half a dozen fair selling platers, which he coddled through

all sorts of equine diseases and spoiled by treating them as children. It was tradition that the old man used to cry a little bit and try to comfort his colts when they were beaten, talking to them as a father would talk to a sulky small boy.

He didn't have much to do with the other owners or with the trainers. Every one around the circuit knew him, liked him and laughed at him—excepting that no one ever laughed at his Bible. He did not mind a bookmaker, or gambler or tout ridiculing him, or even his horses, but he flared up if any one tried to joke about his Bible. He called it "The Old Dope Book," and it was about the only form sheet he ever studied. He used to sit in front of his stables every evening after the races, and much of the time on Sundays, reading his Bible, and every Sunday he went off after his morning chores were done, hunted what he called a "Methody" church, and about noon feeding time he would return, with his shoes shined, and after attending to the horses would sit and ponder over the sermon he had heard.

He said he lived by the Book and that it was the only dope that ever worked out all the time. I have to explain this so you will understand the story of Skilligalee. We used to laugh among ourselves and think that Uncle Dan was a little cracked. There were two stories in the Book that he believed best: the story of the Prodigal Son and the parable of casting bread upon the waters. He was forever picking up little tramps, who came around the tracks, clothing and caring for them, and when told that he was being imposed upon he would quote the old Dope Book and say he was casting bread upon the waters and that it would return to him after many days.

Whether it did or not you may judge from the story.

The horses were racing at Lexington one spring when about the most forlorn, dejected, dirty and worthless looking little rat that ever picked a pocket came whining around the track one morning saying he was hungry. He had beaten his way from Little Rock. He was dirty, disreputable, and although he probably was not fourteen years old, he smelled vilely of tobacco and whisky. We did not know then that he had been caught picking pockets at New Orleans early in the winter, that he had been chased off the track for touting during the Memphis meeting or that he had been caught "rolling a drunk" at Little Rock and served a sentence in the workhouse. He had been an exercise boy before he was eleven, and was chased away from the stables for drinking alcohol used in rubbing the horses.

He was thoroughly bad, but when he reappeared at Lexington he was really hungry, and on a race track, no matter how crooked a person may be, he can have money when he is hungry. It may be thrown at him with a curse, but he gets it. The boy whined around a group until he secured a dollar or so, and some one suggested: "Send him to Uncle Dan."

The chance joke was forgotten until the next day when Uncle Dan strolled into the paddock and that little rat Davey followed, leading one of his colts. I was honestly worried fearing the little reprobate would rob the old fellow, or get him into some sort of trouble, but when I dragged Uncle Dan aside and told him about the boy he quoted Scripture.

"You kain't always tell," he said. "He mought be somebody's prodigal son, eating the husks, and anyhow, it is castin' bread on the waters and maybe it'll be returned after many days. The Old Dope Book says it will—and it is always right."

"You're playing a million to one shot on that kid, Uncle Dan," I told him. "He's dangerous—I thought I'd warn you."

"Kain't always tell," he replied, "lots of good in the worst of us and, anyhow, the Book says—"

Seeing that it was useless I dodged the sermon.

Matters were going from bad to worse with Uncle Dan all that season. His horses had a cough during the early racing and they lacked class anyhow. The old man knew horses, but he always overestimated his own, and "figgered" they'd win. He never would bet more than ten dollars on any race, and I still think that he believed it sinful to bet on any horse owned by another, but all right to wager on his own.

He had a hard time getting through the season. Toward the end of the fall meeting at Louisville some of the boys got together. They knew Uncle Dan never would accept a cent of charity and would consider an offer of help as an insult. So they framed to shoo one of his platers across the line winner, and gave him enough money to save part of his horses and last through the winter.

He returned the next spring with only four horses, two of them old campaigners, the others two-year olds, cheap and almost worthless. The wonder of it was that Davey Layton still was with him—and seemed to have formed some sort of an attachment for the old man. They joined the caravan at Memphis—they raced there in those days—and within a day or two Davey was caught stealing from the feed man.

On a race track, no one has much sympathy for a feed man, and a lot of owners consider it a fine thing to rob him—just to get even. But stealing oats from him at night was another thing. Fortunately the trainer who caught Davey questioned him. He begged and pleaded, as the trainer cuffed and cussed him.

"Please, Mr. Harney," he begged, "do what you want to with me—but don't let the old man know."

The fact that Davey was stealing oats to feed the old man's horses made it different—in the eyes of Harney. He let the boy go, told the gang about it, and Davey rose a lot in our estimation. Some of us really became accessories after the fact, by lying to the feed man and by slipping Davey feed to smuggle into the old man's barns. It seemed a shame, but there wasn't a horse in his little stable that could win a race, he couldn't afford to pay jockey fees, and he had to hustle and scrape to pay his entries. The secretary often gave him credit for fees, so that he could start his horses, and he was in debt. Davey, the little rat, begged a half dozen of us fellows to help him get a license to ride, and, because we felt sorry for Uncle Dan and didn't think it would do any harm, we pestered the stewards until they gave him his license.

By the time we reached Lexington for the spring meeting Uncle Dan was in a bad way. He had mortgaged his two-year olds to get money to ship the stable and we knew the end of his career as an owner was near. One of the other owners offered him an entirely useless job as superintendent of his stables—and he refused.

It was at Lexington that the finish came. Uncle Dan had no money, his debts were larger than his stable's worth. He turned over the two-year olds to the fellow who had advanced him money, and when we heard of it we got together and raised a purse. We knew better than to tender the money to Uncle Dan, so I was appointed to offer him $750 for his two remaining horses, which were not worth twenty dollars unless delivered at a glucose factory. It required finess. I told the old man I had heard that he was selling, and that he was going out to get some new horses. He finally accepted the $750 and I shipped the horses back to a farm in the Blue Grass, chiefly to keep him from suspecting anything.

"I'll be back this fall—with a stable," said the old man. "Reckon I'll pick me up a couple or three likely platers and travel around the fairs a bit this summer."

The next day I heard that Uncle Dan, after paying his little debts, had given $500 to Davey and sent him away to buy horses. I was furious and scolded him.

"Kain't never tell," he replied, "lots of good in that boy if you only know it. Likely he's some one's prodigal, with the fatted calf waiting somewhere for him."

"What good can you find in that little rat?" I asked angrily. "You'll never see your money again."

"Ain't so sure," he said calmly; "he's got his good points. No one can abuse a dog or a hoss when he's near. Reckon he'll be back. Anyhow, I cast my bread on the waters—"

"And you'll wait a long time before it returns," I retorted, and left him.

I was wrong. Davey went off somewhere and picked up three cheap thoroughbreds at a sale—at Paris, I think, and he and Uncle Dan went away to the fairs, promising to come back.

It was a little over a year later, just before the opening at Latonia, that Uncle Dan and Davey returned to the races. I heard that the old man was back, with a stable, that he had registered again, paid his licenses and applied for renewal of Davey's license to ride. So I went around to the back turn to his stables to see him.

He was sitting in a chair tipped back against the lower door of the stable, spectacles on his nose, reading the Old Dope Book. He was older, a little worn and haggard, but hopeful, and his eyes were shining. Davey, looking little changed, was propped against a bale of hay listening to what the old man was reading.

"Well, we're back," said Uncle Dan as we shook hands; "reckoned you was mistook about it. Bread is comin' back steady now. Reckon in a few days a whole bakery is done goin' to come this way."

"How did you do last fall?" I inquired.

"Davey and me done right smart business around the fairs," he said simply. "Them hundred dollar purses mount up, and we won most of them. Davey he's got to be right smart rider—and the bread is comin' back fast."

Davey got up and strolled away, and the old man gazed after him with a strange expression on his old face.

"Reckon there's a lot in the Old Dope Book that you kain't find in the form charts," he said. "Now that boy f'rinstance. No one never was kind to that boy till I took him. Ain't an honester boy in the world than him, to me. Maybe he'll steal a little from them that don't treat him right, but I'd trust him with anything.

"I've told you 'bout what the Book says about castin' bread on the waters, ain't I? Well, that's what I done with him. Now it's comin' back."

Not believing, but sympathetic, I expressed gladness that his luck had turned.

"'Tain't luck," he said, "it's follerin' the Book. It says if you cast bread on waters it'll return manyfold—and, mister, it has."

He hesitated an instant, glanced at me as if in doubt and then added:

"Mister, I wasn't aimin' to tell no one, but you've been my friend. I don't want no one but me and you and Davey to know it—but I've got the best hoss on this track in my barns."

He rose and led the way along the five stalls assigned to him. In four of them were cheap, race worn horses, and in the next, closely screened, was a *horse*.

I have seen many horses, but after the first glance at the animal from which he stripped the blanket, I began to get excited. Rather tall, a little underfleshed, but otherwise a perfect race horse, with perfect slope of shoulder and hip, perfect stifles, lean but powerful legs, a deep chest, a neck revealing power and endurance, and as perfect a head as I ever have seen. A casual might have thought that he was a bit rough, but here was a horse built for speed, for endurance and having every appearance of courage.

"Uncle Dan, where did you get this horse?" I demanded.

"That bread I cast returned as a hoss," he said. "Mister, that hoss is Skilligalee. I brung him down here to win the Hammonton for me. Reckon I'll retire after this season. I'm gettin' old and want to git back onto a farm for the rest of my days—so the waters commenced to bring the bread back just in time."

"How fast has he worked?" I inquired.

"Mister—I ain't never clocked that hoss, but he can run just fast enough to beat any hoss he is racin' against—and at any distance. I picked the Hammonton for him to win because it's over a distance and luck ain't got as much chance to hurt him as in a short race."

"Where did you find him?" I inquired.

It isn't often that such a horse can be bred and reared and still be unknown, and I was curious.

Uncle Dan led me back to the shade of the canvas awning and we sat on a bale of hay while I listened to one of the most remarkable yarns I ever heard.

"You know the Book says that the ways of Providence is mysterious," he remarked, "And they sure are. When I found Davey, hungry and starved, and more starved for a little kindness than for anything else, I just decided that I'd try one more cast on the waters. That boy had been abused

and neglected, and folks don't understand his kind of boy. He was mean and onery and hated folks, and I reckon he done a lot of onery things. But the first thing I see is that Davey likes animals and that they like him. Hosses and dogs seemed to know that he likes them and all the ornery dogs around the track come to him. They seem to understand each other, and one night I hear Davey half cryin' and half cussin' and talking to a little dog in the stall where he was sleepin', and the dog was whimperin' and honest, mister, they sounded just alike—just two of God's critters that have been abused. So I say to myself that Davey ain't as bad as folks think—and kept him around.

"You remember when I had to sell them hosses and sent Davey out to get me some county fair hosses? When he come back I had my suspicions that he didn't get them three hosses for what he said he paid. I ain't ever asked him, but I reckon that boy stole money and paid it in, so I made him partner. He's done most of the work and all the ridin' around the fairs, and him and me talk all the time about buyin' a little place up in the hills and goin' there to live when we make this killin'. Wicked sort of a boy; he ain't got any religion exceptin' to be loyal to any one that's treated him right—and that's how we happened to find Skilligalee."

The old man puffed meditatively on his pipe for a time.

"That boy and that hoss had been treated the same way," he said finally, "and I reckon that hoss is just as anxious to win the Hammonton for me as the boy is. Hosses and dogs and boys is that way.

"Feller that owned him was a trottin' hoss man. He bought that colt to make a trotter out of him. His mother had been a trotter and this feller didn't know much about breedin'. His father was pure thoroughbred. Naturally all colts trots when they're babies and this one trotted natural in exercising. He had a lot of speed, too, but when he was coming into his three-year old season he commenced to break and run in every heat. The man tried best he knew how to cure him and make him trot. He didn't know that hoss was a runner. Finally he gets disgusted and sells him to a feller that ought to be hanged.

"Reckon that colt was beat and abused, and kicked and cussed at as much as Davey was. When Davey finds him in a barn up in southern Indiana he was so pore and skinny he scarcely could race, but he kept tryin'— If a man went into his stall he'd back into the corner and have the shakes, and break out in a sweat and if you tried to put a hand on him he'd bare his teeth and fight. The man that owned him said he was wicked—like you folks all said Davey was wicked, just because they didn't understand.

"Davey finds out about the hoss and we watch him in a race. He trotted a quarter as sweet as any one, and then a big black hoss came alongside him and he started running with the driver sawin' away cruel at his mouth and whipping him until the welts stood out.

"His owner was takin' a fork handle to that colt when Davey and me comes past his barn and Davey, little as he is, jumps at that man and tries to kill him.

"Upshot of it is I buys that colt for eighty-five dollars and Davey goes into his stall with a halter to bring him down to our stables. The colt backs up into the corner, shiverin' and sweatin' and Davey just talks to him a minute, and then rubs his hand along his neck—and pretty soon he leads that colt out and the feller that owned him yells: 'Look out, he'll savage you.' Davey just laughs and puts his head against the colt's neck and leads him away.

"Took us two weeks to get the colt quieted down and used to us. Then Davey starts ridin' him easy under the saddle—and over at the Circleville fair we starts him in a half mile race. He ain't lost a race since—and no one knows how fast he can run."

I'm not superstitious—and I know a horse. The Hammonton was three days off when I saw that colt and for three days I kept telling myself that I was an idiot—and then wondering. I hadn't even seen the horse work. Uncle Dan worked him easy every morning at daylight. No one around the track had any idea that the old man had a real race horse in his barn, and

probably no one excepting me would have believed it. I had planned to make a nice bet on Copper Heels in the Hammonton, but the night before the race I stopped at Uncle Dan's camp fire to talk with him.

"Reckon we'll go up and buy that farm after Latonia closes," he said simply. "The waters is bringing the bread back fast. Tomorrow night we'll be almost rich."

I have told myself a thousand times that I backed Skilligalee because I knew he was a race horse, but the older I grow the more I realize the fact that Uncle Dan's simple faith in the colt and his certainty that he would win and all the bread of his lifetime of casting would come back, decided me.

The advance betting on the race was heavy, and no one saw anything suspicious when I scattered half a dozen five dollar bets on Skilligalee down town in Cincinnati at from seventy-five to a hundred to one. I waited until the old man bet his regular ten dollars the next day; the bookie, out of sympathy, gave him a hundred to one. Some one else was betting, and the price slipped down. Some of the bookies didn't like it and chopped to thirty to one, but I suspected that Davey was stringing his money on his mount.

The race? It wasn't a race. Big Ban and The Deacon went out to make a pace, with Robin Adair and Half a Twin under restraint a length or so back and way on the outside, keeping clear of any possible interference, was Skilligalee, running easy, his powerful head shaking and little Davey leaning low over his neck, talking to him.

They hung in that position past the half mile, and Davey took the big, rawboned fellow clear outside around the turns, running dozens of yards further than the others that were in close to the rail. Turning into the stretch, the boy on Copper Heels made his ride, and when they were fairly straightened away Copper Heels and Robin Adair were fighting it out close in against the rail.

Every one was watching them—when suddenly Davey let Skilligalee down. There was a scream of excitement and then a roar of surprise. Far on the outside of the track there was a horse running as I never have seen a horse run since Salvator. He was running straight and true, and overhauling the pair against the rail at every jump.

He was even with them at the eighth post—and both the jockeys on them had gone to the whip. Davey never moved, only leaned over and kept talking to that horse—and he came home winner by five lengths, and one of the timers said to me afterward: "That colt run the fastest last quarter of a race that ever was run on a track."

I cleaned up close to twelve thousand dollars, and I took half of it to Uncle Dan, telling him I had made a little bet for him while laying my own. Davey had won almost seven thousand dollars, and the old man had eight thousand, including the thousand dollars he won.

The next day he shambled around to my place to say good-by.

"Me and Davey have talked it over," he said, "reckon we'll pull out this evenin' and hunt our farm."

"Quit? Why, man, that horse will earn fifty thousand dollars for you this summer and fall and you can get a big price for him then."

"Me and Davey reckon we've got enough. We won't be needin' much up in the country."

"You'll sell Skilligalee? I'll find a man who'll give you twenty-five thousand," I offered.

"No. Me and Davey reckon that hoss has been beat and abused enough. We ain't takin' any chances some one'll get him who won't understand him. We're takin' him back to the farm with us."

And at dusk that evening, as the crowd from the Latonia track was swarming down through Covington toward Cincinnati, they might have seen an old man and a boy with a sin-seared, young-old face, perched on a buckboard loaded with camp utensils, and trailing behind the cart three blanketed horses. The first of these was Skilligalee—one of the greatest horses the world ever has seen.

The bread upon waters had been returned—and the Old Dope Book proven true.

THE END

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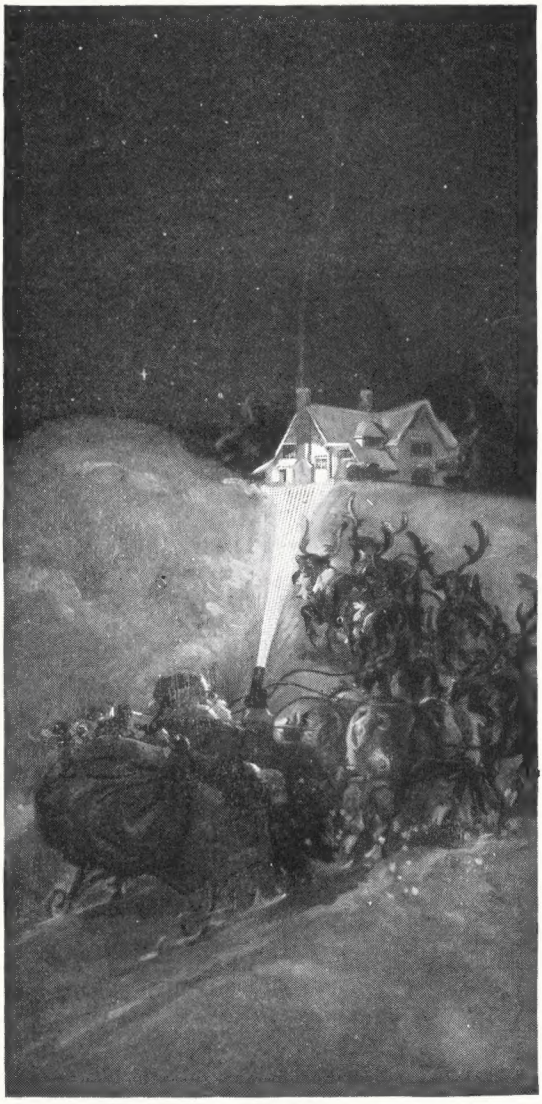

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